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The Faun Awakes.
Gauguin and the revival of the pastoral

In memory of my father.

Paul Gauguin is seated in front of his easel, brush in hand and looking into a mirror which we cannot see. He seems trapped in the narrow space of the attic room, between the sturdy beam, the chair and the easel. The light divides his face into two and gives it a double expression: half sombre and half expectant. Like the face, the painting itself is ambiguous; although modelled with chiaroscuro in grey-brown tones, here and there we see touches of pure, bright red pigment, while on the wall behind, the brushstrokes are aligned in parallel in the manner of Cézanne.

Gauguin's *Self-Portrait* (cat. xx) was painted in May 1885 in Copenhagen, a city in which the artist felt ill at ease and whose inhabitants he described in the following terms: "The most terrible cannibal is nothing compared to a Danish property owner" (1). He had decided to devote himself completely to painting a year and a half earlier. "My wife, the family, in fact everyone throws this cursed painting back in my face, saying that it's shameful not to earn a decent living. But a man's faculties are not enough for two activities and I can only do one: paint" (2). Gauguin and his children lived off the French lessons that his wife Mette gave at home. The

painter was confined to this small upstairs room, as the drawing-room was used by Mette and her pupils, some of whom were from the upper ranks of the Danish aristocracy. Gauguin only had himself as model and he spent the day alone, painting his own portrait (3). Before long he would leave Copenhagen for Paris, in a separation from his family that would eventually become permanent.

When we encounter the artist again, in a second *Self-Portrait* (cat. xx), he is barely recognisable. His gaze and pose are more confident, even a touch arrogant. His hair and beard have grown, giving him the air of a Bohemian dandy. He no longer wears the traditional suit seen in Copenhagen, but rather an embroidered jacket and a shirt with a yellow yoke. This is in fact typical Breton dress, the region where Gauguin had worked for lengthy periods and where his painting underwent a radical change of direction. His intention here seems to be to pay homage to the Breton peasants, still bound to their language, their Catholic faith and their ancient traditions and superstitions. In a letter to his friend Schuffenecker, Gauguin declares his passion for this region: “You are a devotee of Paris. I am rather for the country. I love Brittany: there I find the wild, the primitive. When my clogs ring out on the granite floor I hear the mute, dull and powerful sound that I am seeking in painting...” (4). As if to emphasise this quest for the rustic, Gauguin has used a jute canvas with a thick weave.

It is impossible to state precisely when this self-portrait was created. It may have been in Brittany in the spring of 1888, or more likely in Arles in December during the last few days that Gauguin spent with Van Gogh in the Yellow House (5). “On several occasions”, Gauguin wrote, “Vincent called me the man who comes from afar and will go far” (6). In line

with this idea of a wandering destiny, the image is of everywhere and nowhere. The landscape seen through the window is of neither Brittany or Provence; the misty sky, the purple mountain and the tall trees are more suggestive of the landscapes of Martinique which the artist had painted in 1887 (7). This painting seems to be an evocation or a tropical reverie that looks forward to the Tahiti landscapes.

The face has a green tinge, as if all of the natural world outside were reflected in it. It is modelled in green tones against the green background of the wall. We could almost say that Gauguin has seen himself in the mirror as the green man, that fantastical figure with a face made of leaves who appears in the corners of medieval churches carved in stone or in stained glass windows. A pointed ear can be seen protruding from his hair, seemingly announcing the sitter's hybrid nature, between man and beast. It is unlikely that the artist had read Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Marble Faun*, whose hero was a man who resembled Praxiteles's faun. But he certainly did know Mallarmé's *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, which its own author would dedicate years later to Gauguin with the words: "To the wild man and bibliophile. His friend Stéphane Mallarmé" (9). Gauguin would draw Mallarmé with these same pointed ears.

There are various possible ways to describe the transformation that has taken place between the first self-portrait and the second: as the metamorphosis of a budding painter into a fully-formed artist; of a bourgeois into a colourful bohemian; of a civilised European into a would-be native of a lost region. However, we might also say simply that Paul Gauguin, the former stock-broker, has become a faun.

Voyage to Arcadia

From his exile in Tahiti, in the last days of 1892, Gauguin described to his friend Daniel de Monfried a painting that he had just completed and of which he was particularly pleased. “Exceptionally, I have given it a French title: *Pastorales tahitiennes*, as I did not find a corresponding title in Canac” (10). Why did he need to use a European word – pastoral – for an Oceanic painting? This was not the first time that Gauguin had employed the term. Years before, in 1889, he had entitled a print from the *Suite Volpini* with the name of *Pastorales Martinique*, evoking his trip to the Antilles.

These titles suggest a paradox. Gauguin has come down to us as the personification of the *Überläufer*, the cultural refugee, fleeing from European civilisation to find shelter in a different and alien culture. However, when this fugitive comes to give a name to the experience of passage towards the other, he makes use of a concept – the pastoral – derived from Greco-Latin antiquity and one which embodies better than any other the classical values of the western tradition. The origins of the pastoral date back to the third century BC, when Theocritus wrote his *Idylls* for the sophisticated readers of Alexandria, some of them dealing with the subject of Sicilian shepherds. Two centuries later, Virgil created the definitive treatment of the genre in his *Bucolics*, in which he and his friends appeared transformed into shepherds. Virgil’s example offered the Renaissance a fruitful model, taken up by Petrarch, Boccaccio, Agnolo Poliziano and above all Jacopo Sannazaro, with his enormously successful *Arcadia*, as well as Garcilaso de la Vega, Torquato Tasso and others. The eclogues of these poets juxtapose the ideal simplicity of rural life with the pointless sophistication of the city and court. The shepherd is the pure, simple man, free of

ambition, greed, adulation and envy, and remote from the intrigues and corruption of urban and court society.

A parallel and equally fruitful tradition of the pastoral exists in painting. This was formulated in Renaissance Venice by Giorgione and Titian, and continues in the work of the Carracci and Domenichino, Poussin, Claude, Rubens and Rembrandt, up to Watteau, Boucher and Fragonard (11). If we look as far as the 19th century we see that leading figures such as Constable, Corot and Puvis de Chavannes would appear to confirm the survival of the bucolic genre. However, not even these exceptional artists were able to stem the irresistible process of decline which the pastoral suffered from the Romantic era onwards, at a time of crisis for classical humanism and its values. In mid-19th-century landscape painting and the representation of rural subjects, the fragile conventions of the pastoral gave way to the innovations of realism, while its bucolic ideals seemed out of date in the light of new scientific and ideological concerns such as ethnographic documentation, patriotic exaltation and a desire for social redemption, among others.

The pastoral of the primitive

Surprisingly, however, the pastoral – seemingly doomed to extinction around 1850 – enjoyed a revival in modern art. In 1946, the critic Clement Greenberg observed: “What characterises painting in the line Manet to Mondrian – as well as poetry from Verlaine through Mallarmé to Apollinaire and Wallace Stevens – is its pastoral mood” (12). Greenberg formulated this thesis so that he could then go on to condemn the drift in 20th-century art, which he saw as having abandoned its pastoral origins, moving into a Baroque mode, i.e., into an expression of emotional

violence. Greenberg identified this abandonment of the pastoral with the crisis of avant-garde art. The pastoral implies two conditions and two complementary attitudes: on the one hand, a dissatisfaction with the prevailing customs within social structures and venues, and on the other, a faith in the stability of that society. “One flees to the shepherds from the controversies that agitate the market-place. But this flight – which takes place in art – depends inevitably upon a feeling that the society left behind will continue to protect and provide for the fugitive, no matter what differences he may have with it” (13). For Greenberg, “pastoral security” symbolised the necessary relation between the autonomy of art and the continuity of bourgeois society, which the wars and revolutions of the 19th century had placed in jeopardy.

Without mentioning Greenberg, Lawrence Gowing once again set out and also added further detail to this relationship between the pastoral and the origins of the modern in European art. Gowing maintained that following decades of oblivion, the arcadian ideal was revived by “the non-conforming talents that sought an enterprising alternative to the relics of Impressionist realism in the 1880s” (14). The pastoral tradition became a source of inspiration for the masters of Post-impressionism: Gauguin, Seurat, even Matisse, as according to Gowing it was the pastoral idea which prevented Matisse’s “proto-fauvism” of the 1890s from turning into “a thoroughly muddled proto-expressionism”. With regard to Gauguin, Gowing stated that the artist went to paint in Brittany, summoned by the pastoral tradition and that he renewed that tradition in a new guise, “the pastoral of the primitive”, which would survive into the 20th century (15).

Gowing's formula, "the pastoral of the primitive", allows us to understand the artist's pilgrimages to Brittany, to Martinique, even to Tahiti and the cannibal islands – the Marquesas – no longer as the product of a unique individual psychology, but rather as an option always inherent in the western tradition. Gauguin's words when he stated his longing to "disappear in the forests of an Oceanic island to live there on ecstasy, calm and art" (16) are not the mere random thoughts of an eccentric. Rather, they are the literal (too literal, perhaps) realisation of the cliché of the Valley of Tempe, the *locus amoenus* located in the middle of a wild forest, described so many times from Theocritus's famous *Idyll on the Dioscuri* onwards. Setting Gauguin within the pastoral tradition allows us a new reading of "primitivism" which goes beyond the Romantic stereotypes that have prevailed in the literature on the artist for the past century.

One of the most surprising indications of the continuity between the classical pastoral tradition and Gauguin's primitivism is to be found in his commentaries on Corot's work. We know that Corot was Gauguin's first reference point when he began painting around 1873. Long after he abandoned a superficial imitation of his style, however, Corot would continue to be a model for Gauguin in the most personal and profound sense. In December 1888, when he had already taken his most important step - the break with Impressionism and with the entire tradition of European art from the Renaissance onwards - Gauguin was moved when he recalled the work of Corot. Not so much Corot as a forerunner of realism and Impressionism, but rather the Hellenising and Virgilian painter. "In a landscape by Corot," Gauguin wrote, "there are trees, ivy, clear water in which the nymphs come to bathe at their ease. Corot's nymphs dance like nymphs and not like the mortals of

today. Everything grows, calmly and meditatively, and no-one has ever drowned in the deep waters. Corot's entire soul has passed through his landscapes; the air breathes goodness, while the slender tree trunks express grace and nobility. He has understood Greece with its delights taken from nature" (17).

A further evocation of Corot's nymphs reappears later in a passage of *Avant et Après*, Gauguin's autobiography which he wrote at the end of his life and left among his unpublished papers. I refer to the paragraph which starts with a famous confession: "Sometimes I have gone far back, further than the horses of the Parthenon... to the rocking horse of my childhood, the good wooden horse". This passage is always, however, quoted without the phrase that follows it: "I have dawdled among Corot's nymphs dancing in the sacred woods of Ville d'Avray" (18).

For Gauguin, these nymphs were linked in some obscure way to his attempts to return to the origins of artistic expression. It is thus not surprising that they appear a third time, in another passage in *Avant et Après*, mingled with the verses from *L'Après-midi d'un faune* and with his experiences of Oceania: "These nymphs, I would like to preserve them – and he preserved them, this adorable Mallarmé: happy, guardians of love, of flesh and of life, near the ivy which twines around Corot's great oaks in Ville d'Avray, with its golden tones, its deep, animal odour; here and elsewhere, timeless tropical flavours, even in eternity" (19).

A journey

The present exhibition covers Gauguin's activities from the moment when he became a professional artist to his

departure for Tahiti in April 1891. By the time of his emigration to the South Seas, the artist's stylistic and ideological evolution was almost completed. It is thus in the preceding period, the key years between 1884 and 1890, that we witness the laborious process by which Gauguin absorbed artistic influences, formulated his style, progressed in his quest for the primitive and fully developed the idea of *synthetism* as a pictorial concept parallel to the Symbolist aesthetic.

This period can be seen as a coherent phase with a beginning, development and end. The succeeding sections of this exhibition follow Gauguin's journey through his encounters with the contemporary artists who contributed to the formulation of his style and thinking, in particular five leading names: Pissarro, Cézanne, Degas, Émile Bernard, and Vincent van Gogh. His work under the guidance of Pissarro in the Pointoise circle would set Gauguin out on the path leading back from the urban world to the rural one. Cézanne's new understanding of pictorial composition, his structured brushstroke and decorative calligraphy would offer the artist the first model for moving beyond Impressionism. With Degas, Gauguin re-learned how to draw the figure, the distortions that had to be applied to the human form in order to fit it into the pictorial space. Other younger artists, such as Émile Bernard and Vincent van Gogh, would help him to bring about his definitive break with Impressionism and create a new artistic model.

These various artistic encounters resulted in the gradual formation of "the pastoral of the primitive". Dr Johnson's ironic and caustic definition of the genre as "a decadent affectation of crudeness" (20) might be of use when following Gauguin's steps. Rhetorical tradition

recommended a simple, pared-down style for bucolic subjects: *pastorali vitae convenit stilus humilis*. In order to represent the Arcadia embodied by the Breton peasant women or natives of Martinique (and later the women of Tahiti), Gauguin needed a simple style, which for a late 19th-century artist meant a *simplified* style. Primitivism is the tendency towards a second state of innocence, the route towards a reclaimed rather than natural ingenuity. Rusticity and roughness can only be achieved by shedding a great deal, from the photographic illusionism of some realist artists to the virtuoso brushwork of some of the Impressionists. Gauguin gradually forged his *stilus humilis* not just with the help of his contemporaries, but also by looking to Byzantine painting, Romanesque sculpture, early Renaissance painters, Japanese prints, Breton crucifixion groups, and temple reliefs in Java. To do so he explored the variety of archaising materials and techniques that he needed: painting in wax, preparations without oil and unvarnished surfaces, glazed ceramics and wood carving (21).

The “pastoral of the primitive” created by Gauguin between 1884 and 1885 and developed in his Martinique and Breton painting between 1886 and 1888 would undergo a crisis around 1889-90. As a result of his intention to empathise with the primitive world of Brittany, he developed an anti-naturalist and visionary type of painting linked to literary symbolism, but it is precisely this *surnaturalisme* (to use Baudelaire’s term) which ended by muddying the purity of the pastoral mode. In Brittany, as in Martinique, Gauguin believed he had discovered a world of perfect innocence, a prelapsarian world, prior the Fall. However, from 1888, with the appearance of Christian subjects and ideas, the notions of evil and guilt perverted this paradisical innocence.

Pastoral inspiration would appear again later in Gauguin's Tahitian paintings, but profoundly altered by that major crisis.

1. The circle of Pissarro

In a humorous drawing made years after the event, Georges Manzana, one of Pissarro's sons, evoked a happy picnic with a group of painters on a river bank in the summer of 1881. Seated in the centre is the patriarch of the group, Camille Pissarro. Next to him are Armand Guillaumin and Paul Gauguin. A little further on, painted in front of an easel is Cézanne with his wife cooking on an improvised stove. While the scene did not in fact take place quite in this way, we know that its protagonists worked together that summer on the banks of the Oise. It reflects the high point of that small artists' colony which formed around the Pissarro home in Pontoise.

Pissarro was the only master, in the sense of teacher, of the Impressionist group, for the reason that he was always ready to learn from artists younger than himself. This was the case with Cézanne, who worked intermittently with him for a decade, and with Seurat and his friends Signac and Luce, whom he joined in the Neo-Impressionist group. Pissarro helped Van Gogh to adapt himself to Impressionism and in his last years was even able to offer some useful advice to the young Henri Matisse. Many years after his personal rupture with the great patriarch, Gauguin acknowledged his debt to him: "If one examines Pissarro's work as a whole, despite its fluctuations [...] one finds not just an excessive artistic will which never contradicts itself, but also an essentially intuitive art of fine lineage. [...] He has looked at everyone, you say! And why not? Everyone has also looked

at him but renounced him. He was one of my masters and I do not renounce him” (22).

While Gauguin came to painting as a pure auto-didact, Pissarro helped him to become a real painter. He was the ideal guide to initiate Gauguin into the pastoral tradition which the younger artist had already discerned in the work of Corot. In contrast to Degas or Renoir, who were essentially urban artists, or even Monet and Sisley, whose landscapes were seen through the gaze of the city-dweller, Pissarro was the Impressionist artist most interested in rural life. While Monet frequented the Normandy beaches crowded with summer visitors or the bends of the Seine peopled by Parisians on Sunday outings, Pissarro preferred country vegetable plots and village paths. His gaze was, however, totally distinct from the rhetoric of that poet of peasant life par excellence, Millet. “Far from expressing the soul and life of the peasants as Millet did [...]”, wrote Maurice Denis, “[Pissarro] observed them with the curiosity of a Gauguin avid for the exotic” (23). Following Denis, we can play with this idea of the exchange of roles between master and pupil, interpreting Pissarro from the standpoint of Gauguin. Like Gauguin later on, Pissarro would come to feel the desire to turn rustic and somewhat primitive: “I am of a rustic temperament, melancholic, coarse and wild in appearance, only pleasing from a distance” (24). Like Gauguin, Pissarro had grown up far from Europe, in the tropics, and was of mixed-race background. Anticipating Gauguin, Pissarro also sought his models outside the tradition of western art, in the art of other cultures, as he shows in his advice to his son: “Look at the Persians, the Chinese, the Japanese, formulate your taste from the really strong men, always go to the source: in painting the

primitives, in sculpture the Egyptians, in miniature the Persians" (25).

Gauguin worked with Pissarro in Pontoise in 1881, in 1882 and for the last time in the summer of 1883. At the end of that year he decided to devote himself to painting, and in January 1884 he went to live with his family in Rouen, where he hoped to meet wealthy collectors. This was the start of his first truly productive period. He still felt insecure about his technique and execution and accepted the advice and corrections that Pissarro offered him, as we know from letters of this period (26). A marked parallel can be detected between Gauguin's work in Rouen and Pissarro's in Pontoise. Pissarro's work in Pontoise is located on the dividing line between the rural and the urban, a division which would become more defined years later. The same was also the case with Gauguin's work in Rouen. The two artists focused on transitions, on the passages between inhabited areas and nature and between architecture and vegetation, such as rivers and bridges, market gardens and above all paths, possibly the key motif of their landscapes. Their paintings always feature small figures coming and going on the path or road, in constant movement from the city to the countryside or vice versa

Both Pissarro's *Rue de l'Hermitage in Pontoise* (1875) (cat. xx) and Gauguin's *Rue Jouvenet, Rouen* (1884) (cat. xx) depict settings familiar to each artist, as they represent the area around their respective houses. In both cases, the light from the streets crossing at right angles establishes a measured *andante* rhythm receding into the distance. There, in the background the urban area meets a horizon of vegetation: nature envelops the architecture. In fact, however, the opposite case is the more common one, in which the houses

are shifted towards the background. Pissarro painted his *Cabbage Fields* (1873) (cat. xx) in a part of Pontoise known as “Le Chou” (The Cabbage). In this autumn landscape only the small, scarcely visible figures of three peasants people what appears to be a scene of total bucolic solitude. However, through the curtain of trees we can make out houses on the hill. This ambiguity seems even more thought-out in *Street in Rouen* (1884) (cat. xx), a work by Gauguin that may have been exhibited (although it is difficult to be sure) in the eighth Impressionist exhibition of 1886, and which produces the impression of a purely rural landscape. In fact, however, it depicts an empty plot of urban land: the trees on the right are those of a cemetery near the artist’s house (27). Both Pissarro and Gauguin offer us the chance to follow these changing perspectives in parallel, this game of hide-and-seek which consists of looking at the country from the city and (not) looking at the city from the country.

Cézanne’s formula

Among Gauguin’s relationships with the regulars of Pissarro’s circle, the one with Cézanne is the most difficult to pin down (there is no surviving correspondence between them, nor any indication that they may have become friends), but it was also the most important. The Cézanne whom Gauguin met in 1881 in Pontoise was ten years older than Gauguin and much more developed with regard to the formulation of his own style. Gauguin envied his “secret formula” as he jokingly put it to Pissarro in June 1881: “Has M. Césanne [sic] found the precise formula for a work accepted by everyone? If he finds the recipe for compressing the exaggerated expression of all his sensations into a single and unique procedure, I beg of you to make him talk about it in his sleep, by giving him one of those mysterious

homeopathic drugs and come to Paris as soon as possible to tell me about it" (28). Gauguin's students recalled how he would sometimes set to work saying "Let's do a Cézanne" (29). It is hardly surprising that all this encouraged Cézanne's paranoid tendencies, the sensation of being persecuted and exploited. Towards the end of his life he would repeat often the phrase: "I just had one little feeling, and M. Gauguin stole it from me" (30).

What Gauguin envied above all in Cézanne was his discovery of a method for moving beyond Impressionism, which by that point had begun to degenerate into a mannered style. One day in July 1884, Gauguin visited the exhibition in the Durand-Ruel gallery of around 20 works by Monet, most painted in Bordighera between January and April of that year. Although he acknowledged Monet's "great qualities" and admired his "remarkable" execution, Monet's delight in this brilliance of handling seemed to Gauguin a dangerous path to pursue. To counterbalance this impression, when he left the Durand-Ruel gallery, Gauguin went into Père Tanguy's shop and was fascinated to find there four paintings by Cézanne painted in Pontoise: "marvels of an essentially pure art and one which one never tires of looking at" (31).

In discussing Cézanne's influence on Gauguin, elements such as the ordering of the brushstroke into parallel vertical or diagonal lines and the geometrical simplification of the outlines of the objects are frequently mentioned. However, what Gauguin learned from Cézanne cannot simply be reduced to this. The major theme of a Cézanne-like still life by Gauguin such as *The White Cup* (1886) (cat. xx) is a Baroque interplay of the ambiguities between appearance and reality. The printed wallpaper so often found in the

background of works by Cézane, for example his *Fruit Dish, Plate and Apples* (1879-80) (cat. xx), is used by Gauguin to create a sort of dance between the flowers in the vase, their image in the mirror and the flowers on the wallpaper. The real flowers are located on the borderline between two illusions: the reflection on one side and the wallpaper on the other. It is as if Gauguin were thinking about the nature and limits of pictorial illusionism.

The wallpaper is also a protagonist in some of the portraits of this period. *The Owner's Daughter* (1886) (cat. xx), if its traditional title is not misleading, must be a portrait of the daughter of the street advertising firm in which Gauguin found himself obliged to work in the winter of 1885-86 in order to relieve his somewhat desperate financial situation. A sort of "cosmetic" counterpoint which animates the face of the sitter is established between the cold, greenish flowers, the wallpaper and the strong red of the shawl, the latter in turn emphasising the red of her lips. The sketchy flowers, like the curls that fall over her forehead, give a coquettish air to this young woman who, despite her lack of beauty, looks out and smiles at the spectator with a seeming desire to seduce. Between this rhetoric of seduction and the sobriety of the portraits of Madame Cézanne, with her expressionless eyes and her mute, mask-like face, there is a huge gulf.

However, other portraits reveal a much greater affinity with Cézanne. The *Portrait of Clovis* (cat. xx) must also have been painted in the winter of 1885-86, which Gauguin spent in Paris with his six-year-old son Clovis, whom he had brought with him from Denmark. The artist's letters to his wife offer us a moving testimony of the miserable existence of father and son during those months, living in an unfurnished house, at times with nothing more than a little bread and

sausage for dinner. The letters also describe Clovis's sadness, how he frequently asked when his mother was arriving and how he became accustomed to play alone in a corner so as not to disturb his father. They tell of how the child fell ill and of Gauguin's desperate search for work. All these moving details are notably absent in the painting. Gauguin clearly abandons here the type of psychological portrait that had prevailed in the nineteenth century and rethinks the genre from the starting point of purely visual values. His Clovis seems close to Cézanne's portrait of his son Paul (*The Artist's Son in a Red Chair*, 1881-82). Like Cézanne, Gauguin simplifies the line and gives the sitter a monumental, hieratic quality. The figures are made more legible at the expense of superficial likeness, with the nose and the distance between the eyes made larger, and the hands and head made more vigorous, the latter as round as if carved in stone. While Cézanne's portrait of his son establishes a contrast between the contiguous curves of the head and chair, Gauguin finds his counterpart for Clovis's head in the basket of flowers which is not a real basket of flowers but rather a decorative finial at the top of the stairs: a bouquet as stone-like as the head of the child itself (32).

2. Landscape and Arabesque

“In the centre of the Paradise, Ygdrasil, the logarithmic tree, sunk its roots of life into the soil, and the thick shadow of its leaves moved over the grass around it where the lone Night spread out. Leaning against its trunk in the shadow was the book of the Mystery, which set out the truth that had to be known. And in the course of the day, the wind, breathing on the leaves of the tree, spelled out the required hieroglyphics.”

André Gide, *Le traité du Narcisse* (33)

The first time that Gauguin's name appeared alongside those of the Impressionists was in the fourth exhibition held by that group in 1879. The single work he exhibited on that occasion was not in fact a painting but a marble bust of his eldest son, Emil, which was not included in the catalogue as the artist had only been invited to take part very shortly before the opening. However, "M. Gauguin" does appear in the same catalogue as the owner of three exhibited paintings by Pissarro. One of them was *Landscape in February. Women returning from the Fountain* (1878) (cat. xx), whose bare, slender trees against the luminous sky gave the composition a delicate, measured rhythm (34). This device, which Pissarro used on other occasions, had a primarily formal function. In the same way that Manet used the rail in *The Balcony*, or the large metal railings of the Gare Saint-Lazare in *The Railway*, Pissarro used this screen of trees to *support* the scene on the picture surface. The spectator's gaze, rather than losing itself and disappearing into the distance, is obliged to pause in a nearer plane. At the same time, the interlaced, aligned trees imbue the landscape with a certain lyrical tone. The poet and critic Albert Aurier (who would be the great champion of Gauguin's art) noted that in Pissarro's landscapes, "the monotonously curving lines of the grove of willows, the curtain of poplars, help to create the impression of a tender rural peacefulness" (35). Another confirmation of the pastoral mode, we might suggest.

The device of the tree trunks and branches as a support for the composition would later be developed by Cézanne. Gauguin owned a work by the artist with "the trees aligned like soldiers and the shadows projected in succession like a flight of steps" (36). Cézanne explored all the possibilities that trees offered: the aligned, parallel trunks and the sinuous

branches; trees as classical columns or forming pointed arches or cross-vaulting, Gothic filigree against blue sky. However, along with these variations on the structure of the picture surface, the tree could also be an isolated entity, a hero in plant-form dominating the landscape, like the solitary tree next to the pond of the Jas de Bouffan, or the great pine which rises up on the flat Provençal plain and rivals the Mont Saint-Victoire behind it in symbolic power. Gauguin's painting also features these two possibilities: the tree as a structure within the landscape, and the tree as a sign that it has freed itself from the landscape and stands above it. In *A Market Garden below the Church of Bihorel* (1884) (cat. xx) the central tree, with its radial structure, is the framework that supports the dense mass of vegetation. In *Bonfire next to a River* (1886) (cat. xx) an almost identical organisation of the branches is to be seen, but this time raised up on the horizon, delineating its arabesque like a signature against the sky.

This exaltation of the tree as an isolated sign appears in a work by Cézanne that seems to have been particularly influential for Gauguin: his *View of L'Estaque* (1883-1885) (cat. xx). The lines of the very long, slim trunks spring from their bases together, then separate into a graceful curve and continue in parallel lines towards the sky. The vertical format, unusual in a landscape, further reinforces the ascending sensation of this hairpin-form that is both two trees and one at the same time (and which also appears in some of Cézanne's drawings, such as *Trees and Roof* (1882-1883) (cat. xx)). Gauguin undoubtedly had this *View of L'Estaque* in mind when he painted *Cattle at the Watering Trough* (1885) (cat. xx), set in the meadows near Dieppe. The Cézanne-like brushwork which Gauguin used for the dense foliage of the forest, is always mentioned in relation to this

painting, but it is not, however, the most interesting aspect of Cézanne's influence. The “hairpin” of trees taken from the *View of L'Estaque* and reinforced with the parallel lines of other trunks, becomes a powerful central band that traverses and dominates the composition from top to bottom.

The interest in these trees in *L'Estaque* is related to a particular interpretation of Cézanne's use of drawing. Around 1884-85, Gauguin was fascinated by graphology, analysing Pissarro's character on the basis of his handwriting and asking others for samples of their hand. “You see”, he wrote, “how thought has a direct influence on writing. Do you have a letter by Césanne [sic]?” (37). In January 1885, in a letter to Schuffenecker which is one of the first statements of his personal aesthetic, Gauguin offers a discourse on the various types of lines (noble lines and deceitful lines, the straight line as a symbol of the infinite and the curved line as a symbol of the limited), and argues that an artist's drawing can be read according to the rules of graphology: “Take Césanne [sic] the misunderstood; he cultivates the essentially mystical nature of the Orient [...] in the guise of the mystery and weighty tranquility of the man who lies down to dream” (38). The reference here to the “mystical nature of the Orient” would be repeated by Gauguin on another occasion when he referred to the sinuous ornamental lines of old Persian art in the Dieulafoy collection in the Louvre. Speaking of them, he observed that “one needs immense genius to imagine flowers that are muscles of animals or muscles that are flowers. All the dreaming, mystical Orient is to be found there” (39). We can associate the Oriental mysticism which Gauguin believed he could see in the work of Cézanne with that “song of the arabesque”, that Matisse referred to in praise of the artist. [¿qué ha sido de la nota al pie?]

The Tree of Paradise

Like an obsessive motif, Cézanne's "hairpin" tree-form reappears once more in Gauguin's painting, in one of the masterpieces of his stay in Martinique in 1887: *Tropical Vegetation*. In Gauguin's Martinique canvases, the atmospheric landscape of Impressionism gives way to a vision which is marked by an emphasis on the decorative surface. In this view of the bay of Saint-Pierre, with the sea and Mount Pelée in the background, the artist has hidden the city of Saint-Pierre between the luxuriant vegetation in order to create a landscape untouched by human presence. The rich palette of greens and blues with touches of crimson and orange and the parallel brushstrokes in the manner of Cézanne give the painting the feel of an Oriental carpet, as has often been observed. And within the dense network that covers the picture surface we see two extended branches of a papaya tree, like a liberated sign. The way of drawing its parallel lines, which join together to form a sort of bow, anticipates Victor Horta's iron columns, Henry van de Velde's candelabra, or other examples of Art Nouveau metalwork. While Octave Mirabeau saw in Gauguin's Martinique landscapes "an almost religious mystery, a sacred abundance of Eden" (41), this papaya tree is the tree of paradise which summarises the entire mythical and legendary character of the tropical island.

The trees with their calligraphic presence are to be found in almost all the Martinique works. Possibly the finest example is *The Cove of Saint-Pierre seen from the Anse Turin* (1887) (cat. xx). As in *Tropical Vegetation*, in this work the city of Saint-Pierre remains hidden, here behind the outcrop of white rock extending into the sea. The human and animal figures

to be found in other Martinique compositions have been relegated to the distance in order to focus on the trunks and branches of the vines which interlace in the foreground. This emphasis on the arabesque of the trees has been associated with the prints of Hokusai and Hiroshige. However, at this point Gauguin does not seem to have been interested in Japanese art (which he only turned to in 1888), and it is more convincing to relate it once again to Cézanne, for example the serpentine interlaced branches of the trees in *The Sea at L'Estaque* (1878-79). As with Cézanne's sinuous branches, Gauguin's trees frame the background landscape with the volcano below the cloudy sky and the bustle of people on the beach. However, the interlaced vine branches in the foreground also have a symbolic value: the large x-shape which they create literally blots out the realistic aspect of the landscape and transforms nature into a fantastical stage set. The vines are a door, a sort of gateway which blocks or allows access into a distant and mythical domain. Their sinuous feminine curves summarise the sensual, eroticised landscape of the tropical paradise.

The tree as sign will reappear on numerous occasions in Gauguin's work, up to his late Oceanic paintings. We encounter it once more in the diagonal trunk that crosses *The Vision of the Sermon* (1888) (cat. xx), dividing the canvas and separating the real from the imaginary. It is present again in *Shepherd and Shepherdess in the Meadow* (1888) (cat. xx), in which the intimacy between the human figures is reflected in the entire natural setting, both in the bull and cow resting on the grass and in the two tall trees, one of which leans towards the other. Lastly, in *Christ on the Mount of Olives* (1889) (cat. xx) the motif appears once more as a sad, charred remnant of the tree of Paradise.

3. The nude and the dance

A largely overlooked early work by Gauguin is, in fact, crucial for deciphering the development of the “pastoral of the primitive” in his work. This is a carved wood relief entitled *La Toilette* (cat. xx), dated 1882 and dedicated “à mon ami Pissarro”. Although Pissarro’s letter acknowledging this gift has not survived, we do have Gauguin’s reply to it: “I am totally abashed and blushing to read your compliments regarding the wood carving which I sent you; I am happy that you liked it” (42). Pissarro undoubtedly grasped the homage that was intended by the gift: the girl in *La Toilette* evokes the figures of seated peasants on the grass which are so common in his work of that period (see for example, *Seated Peasant with Child* of 1881). While taking his former teacher as his starting-point, here Gauguin goes much further in his simplification of the anatomy, anticipating his later evolution towards primitivism and synthetism.

The nude is a rare subject in Gauguin’s early work. One exception is the famous *Suzanne sewing* (1881) which drew Huysman’s praise (43). *La Toilette* is the exact opposite of that painting: rather than an adult woman, we have an adolescent; rather than working, the sitter focuses on her body; rather than an interior, the setting is a sketchy landscape. While *Suzanne sewing* is a late sample of naturalist painting, *La Toilette* contains the seed of the future development of the “pastoral of the primitive”. The naked girl in a landscape, identified with the earth, is a symbolic subject that Gauguin would explore a decade later in *Loss of Virginity* (1890). The angular, androgynous body and the stiff pose will appear again, for example, in one of the *Breton Bathers* of 1888 (cat. xx). Also important is the monstrous,

grotesque foot that terminates the body ~~at the top~~ and recalls numerous examples of archaic sculpture, from figures on Romanesque capitals to Hindu temple reliefs. The exaggeratedly large hands and feet reappear in *Breton Bathers* and *The Wrestlers* (1880), as well as *Loss of Virginity* (1890-91) as a sign of regression, the indication of a rough, primitive nature.

Learning from Degas

The brilliant precedent of *La Toilette* was not, however, followed up. Four years would pass before Gauguin would once more turn to the nude and to the human figure in general. I do not refer by this to the small figures that are always to be found as accessories in his landscapes, but rather to large-scale figural compositions. Towards the mid-1880s, other artists associated with Impressionism, such as Pissarro, Renoir and the young Seurat, were all tempted to undertake ambitious figure subjects. Gauguin did not look to any of these artists, however, but focused instead on Degas. Pissarro and Degas represented two rival leaderships within the Impressionist group, and while Gauguin had aligned himself with one of them, he had kept his distance from the other, frequently accusing him of intrigues and of sabotaging the Impressionist group's exhibitions (44). Following his break with Pissarro in 1886, however, the result of the older artist's association with the Neo-Impressionist group, the way was opened for a closer association with Degas, and in the autumn of 1886 Pissarro commented sarcastically on this new relationship (45).

One of Gauguin's first references to Degas in his correspondence relates to his talents in drawing: "Manet assumed the uniform of leader; now that he has died, Degas

will take over from him, and this is an impressionist who draws!” (46). Inevitably, drawing was what interested Gauguin in Degas. For him, Degas’ draughtsmanship had a negative aspect: its naturalist aspect, which Gauguin graphically called the “bad odour of the model” (47). At the same time, however, Degas was the master who did not fear to disobey nature and subject human anatomy to whatever distortions were required. Émile Bernard noted that in 1886, Gauguin “spoke above all about Degas, for whose aesthetic distortion he had the greatest respect” (48). Over time Gauguin would assemble his own pantheon of great masters of drawing, whom he appreciated in terms of their distortion of the figure: Botticelli, Cranach, Delacroix and Ingres. Degas was the last in this tradition.

Gauguin’s large figural compositions up to 1888 are devoted to two subjects typical of Degas: bathing and the dance. In a work that can be seen as a forerunner, *Bathers at Dieppe* (1885), the two subjects are combined. A work by Degas is usually cited as a precedent for this painting, *Peasant Women bathing in the Sea at Sunset* (1875-76) (cat. xx). This is a pastoral dance with the air of a primitive ritual, more redolent of Gauguin than many works by the artist himself, more *sauvage* than the paintings of the official savage. Normally, however, the subjects of bathing and the dance have a different character in Degas’s work: his bathers and dancers move across the parquet of Parisian interiors. Gauguin would translate them into a new, bucolic context.

The women seen washing themselves, drying or arranging their hair in Degas’ pastels, shrouded in the shadowy light of their apartments, are now transformed into outdoor bathers. The figures in *Two Bathers* (1887) (cat. xx) recall precedents in the work of Degas (such as the pastel of *The Bath, Woman*

drying herself, of 1887 (cat. xx)), but transposed to a wooded landscape on the outskirts of Pont-Aven. The critic Fénéon described these two figures and the marked contrast between them: “One of them, cut in two at waist level by the water, has splendidly drawn shoulders, an opulent bourgeois form: on the grass, a timid little maid with short, rigid hair and a stupid mouth, looks at her, trembling and hesitant to take the last step, her left hand on her knee – she swings her hips. A slender trunk, like a smooth straight shaft, already seen in Cézanne, separates and divides the canvas into two compartments” (49). This trunk which divides the image into two (and which had also appeared in the work of Degas, for example his *Jockeys before the Race*, Barber Institute, Birmingham), emphasises the contrast between the two women, the androgynous one and the sensual red-head. The undergrowth conceals a third figure: that of a deer, which could be a satirical symbol of Eros. The scene is perhaps a distant evocation of the traditional iconography of Adam and Eve in Paradise, located on either side of the Tree of Knowledge. It is as if these two bathers were an eccentric parody of the First Couple.

With regard to the other subject, the dance, Gauguin also translates what he borrows from Degas into a new setting. *Breton Girls' Dance* (1888) (cat. xx), which Gauguin described in a letter to Theo van Gogh as “a Breton gavotte danced by three young girls in the middle of the hay” (50), seems to derive from an illustration by Caldecott for Blackburn’s book *Breton Folk* (51). Disregarding the picturesque detail of Caldecott’s print, with its theatrical details of set and clothing, Gauguin focuses on the essential: the minimal group of the three girls, like three young Graces, stripped of any festive context that would explain their gaiety. This removal of context around the figures makes them almost as

unreal as Corot's dancing nymphs, so beloved of Gauguin. The isolation between the girls, who are shown looking outwards, emphasises the static and monumental character of each figure. This is particularly the case with the one seen frontally, who recalls one of Degas' ballerinas in second position (*Dancer with open Arms*, ca. 1878) (cat. xx). This figure also offers us a particularly illuminating example of Degas' influence. Some time after completing the painting, Theo van Gogh found a buyer for it, and asked Gauguin if he would alter a detail that did not please this collector, specifically the girl's right arm, which ended near the edge of the painting with an outsized hand. This monstrous hand which Gauguin ultimately "corrected" recalls once again *La Toilette*, and the large feet and hands of primitive figures. Gauguin explained that he had made the girl's hand disproportionate "in order to balance the dance which has an s-shape" (52). We can find no better example of one of those *artistic distortions* of which Degas was the master, and which subordinated the delineation of each figure to the rhythm and arabesque of the overall composition.

Puer eternus

The pastoral was traditionally linked to the idea of youth and adolescence, ages expressive of innocence and purity prior to the Fall. The shepherd is the eternal youth – the *puer eternus*. The *Breton Girls' Dance* (cat. xx), like the paintings that follow it, focuses on the outdoor activities of adolescents. *Young Breton Bathers* (cat. xx), painted in late June or early July 1888, is located in a bathing spot at the Moulin-Neuf, one of the flour mills on the banks of the Aven, where Gauguin had already painted in the summer of 1886, producing his *Bathing at the Bois d'Amour Mill* in a style that can still be called Impressionist. If we compare that painting with *The Two*

Bathers, mentioned earlier, we see certain similarities between the compositions, such as the opposition between the two figures and the dividing tree, here shifted further back. However, the psychological or social nuances have gone, as well as any narrative pretext. The two boys are isolated from each other, each self-absorbed. The figures derive from a large charcoal drawing and have almost the feel of academic nude studies. An unorthodox and archaicising type of academic study, we might add, which, with its thin, angular bodies recalls the *Young Spartans Exercising* (ca. 1860).

Gauguin returns to the figures and setting in this work in another painting of the same format with which it seems to form a pendant: *The Young Wrestlers*, depicting the traditional Breton wrestling known as *gouren*. When he completed this painting in early July, the artist explained to Schuffenecker: “I have just made some nudes that you will like. Not at all like Degas - / The last one is a scene of two young boys near the river – completely Japanese for a savage [deleted: Frenchman] from Peru” (53). Gauguin thus confirms at a later date his gravitation towards Degas evident in the earlier nudes. In addition, the off-centre composition and fragmentation of the image contradict Gauguin’s statement that he had liberated himself completely from Degas, as he claims here. With regard to the reference to the “Japanese”, this is also highly significant; up to now Gauguin’s allusions to Japanese art were limited to some occasional print included in his still lifes. But this plunging view with its notably high horizon, and use of a low vanishing point is a synthesis of Japanese compositional devices.

If the paintings of Breton girls and boys of 1888 exude eroticism, it is one not contaminated by adult passions: the artist himself stands aside from the scene, not mingling with

it, as a purely Platonic spectator. However, in 1889, when Gauguin returned to the subject of bathers in his *Nude Breton Boy* (cat. xx), everything had changed. The boy's body lacks the naturalness of the bathers of the previous year, and the frontal pose implies that he is inevitably conscious of being painted. The viewpoint, as well as stripping away any last vestige of spatial depth, suggests the artist's omnipotence over his model. The face and hands appear reddened by the sun, while the rest of the body is white, suggesting an "undressed" rather than nude model, although the red colour of the face might also suggest a blush of shame and anger. The oblique set of the eyes, the fox-like gaze suggestive of a malignant animal that Gauguin uses with other models (such as his portraits of the painter Meyer de Haan), suggest that the boy turns against the painter-voyeur who has imposed his authority over him. Something disturbing has infiltrated the pastoral environment, a certain perversion. The body seems crushed against the ground like an insect, with the limbs almost dislocated, suggesting some of Klimt and Schiele's drawings with their similar charge of disturbing sexuality. What is odd is that this pose repeats the position of Christ in the *Pietà* of the Nizon Calvary group, which Gauguin would also use that same year in his *Green Christ* (54). By simply changing the context, the artist had discovered the possibility of modifying the meaning of the images, converting the sacred into the profane or transforming a funerary monument into a dubious erotic image.

4. The Vision

"The country people, of course, cherish the unlovely idols of an earlier time, such as those which Pausanias found still devoutly preserved in Arcadia. Athenaeus tells the story of

one who, coming to a temple of Latona, had expected to find some worthy presentiment of the mother of Apollo, and laughed on seeing only a shapeless wooden figure”.

Walter Pater, “Winckelmann”, *The Renaissance* (55)

The first indications of Gauguin’s shift away from Impressionism appear at a very early date, in a letter to Pissarro of 1881. They take the form of an attack against Monet and Sisley: “*A note* of plein air can be an agreeable thing here and there, but it doesn’t constitute an entire painting, and the proof is that you take the trouble to make one” (56). The Impressionist aesthetic had blurred the difference between *étude* and *tableau*; Gauguin, in contrast, considered that a painting had to be constructed, and for this reason he encouraged Pissarro to “work more in the studio”, creating “things matured beforehand from the viewpoint of composition and setting” (57).

In line with this idea, Gauguin developed a working method which consisted of producing “documents” (sketches or studies) which he compiled for use in later paintings. In 1884, for example, he wrote to Pissarro: “I started a large number of things which I wish to show you, I hope you will find them interesting, I am not looking for results, they are documents which I am keeping for later” (58). Gauguin would remain faithful to this method for the rest of his career. His documents are of human figures and animals which he later incorporated into landscape settings. He used this archive of motifs with enormous freedom, increasing or diminishing the size of the figures, inverting them or combining them with others. As with Rodin, Gauguin created his compositions on the basis of fragments, which

he reused and re-combined in different works, often far apart chronologically.

As was the case with Rodin, this method inevitably affected the connection between the various elements that made up the composition, questioning that congruity between figures and landscape which was the norm for realist and Impressionist painters. The result at times approximates a collage. This effect is particularly visible in *Breton Women at the Bend in the Road* (cat. xx), painted in Pont-Aven in the late winter or early spring of 1888. The monumental figure in the foreground is taken from a large pastel which apparently dates from 1886. The marked outlines and disproportion between the foreground group and the elements of the landscape provokes a violent rupture between the figures and the background. We might say that these Breton women are not located within the landscape, but rather stand in front of a backdrop or theatrical curtain. It would be possible to change the landscape background for a different one without changing anything essential in the composition. *Breton Women at the Bend in the Road* thus anticipates the non-naturalist organisational principle of the painting that Gauguin would use in his most crucial work, the *Vision of the Sermon*.

Cloisonnisme

However, the style of *Breton Women at the Bend in the Road* is still an Impressionist one. To make the jump to the *Vision of the Sermon* Gauguin required the stimulus of an external factor, a sort of catalyst. A few days before 15 August 1888, Pont-Aven saw the arrival of Émile Bernard, a young artist whom Gauguin had met and appreciated for his daring (59). The year before in Paris, Bernard had worked with another

painter, Louis Anquetin, in a collaboration that had given rise to a new pictorial style representing a clear break with Impressionism. In March 1888, the critic Édouard Dujardin baptised this style with the name of “cloisonnisme”. The name derived from the technique of cloisonné enamelling, in which the surface to be worked is divided into compartments by strips of metal so that the colours of the enamel remain separate during firing. Pictorial cloisonnisme was characterised by the concept of isolating areas of flat colour between pronounced outlines: Dujardin pointed to the *images d'Épinal* and to Japanese art as the models, in which lines were drawn first then the colours filled in. He could also have mentioned stained-glass windows as another source of inspiration. Overall, Dujardin emphasised the “hieratic quality” of the line and colour in this new style and its decorative effect. The cloisonniste painter had freed himself from the slavery of appearance and illusionism in order to try and “set down, with the fewest possible lines and characteristic colours, the intimate reality, the essence of the object” (60).

All these features are to be found in a painting which Émile Bernard painted in Pont-Aven in the summer of 1888: *Breton Women in the Meadow* (cat. xx). Gauguin came to own the painting as the result of an exchange of works and took it with him to Arles, where Van Gogh made a copy of it (cat. xx). Before this, however, Gauguin had created another work which Bernard considered to be directly inspired by his. In the words of the artist himself: “The Pont-Aven Pardon had just taken place, and I had painted, taking the local costume as my subject, a sunny meadow with a preconceived idea in yellow, decorated with Breton headdresses and groups in blue-black. This painting was taken by Gauguin as the basis for his *Vision of the Sermon*, in

which the headdresses are also the main motif [...] This painting of flat colours created a contrast to the point of negation with Paul Gauguin's previous works, and he came close to the point of resembling my *Breton Women in the Meadow*" (61).

The *Vision of the Sermon* depicts a group of Breton women who have listened to the priest's sermon and subsequently witness an apparition in the meadow of the biblical combat between Jacob and the Angel; some of them watch absorbed while others pray with closed eyes. Gauguin explained the work in a letter to Schuffenecker: "This year I have sacrificed everything, execution, colour, for style, wishing to impose on myself something different to that which I already know how to do" (62). We might ask to what extent this style was determined by Bernard's influence. In the *Vision* we encounter undeniable affinities with *Breton Women in the Meadow*: the flat, uniform background, the colours enclosed within simplified outlines painted in black and Prussian blue, as well as the caricatural faces of the Breton women and the large stylised headdresses. Merette Bodelsen has noted that from 1886 Gauguin was experimenting with techniques of decorative painting on ceramic and that these experiments could have led him to cloisonnisme independently of Bernard (63).

Whatever the case, there are certain key differences between Gauguin's painting and Bernard's which are worth pointing out. Above all the colour, which is much bolder in the *Vision of the Sermon*, more unreal than Bernard's greenish-yellow. Here we find a pure vermillion that Gauguin had already used in his still life *Fête Gloanec* (1888). A more fundamental difference is the composition: Bernard's painting is characterised by the absence of any spatial organisation,

while in the *Vision of the Sermon* we can recognize a coherently applied principle. The figures of the Breton women are arranged in a line, leading the gaze to the left from the foreground into the distance. The tree that crosses the painting in a diagonal line separates the women from the group of wrestlers (inspired by Japanese prints), dividing the scene into two worlds: the real and the imaginary. This opposition between earthly reality and the vision is emphasised by the difference of scale and of treatment between the foreground and the background. The Breton women painted in the foreground are modelled bodies with some volume, but the group of wrestlers is a small, flat image.

A precedent for this contrast between the foreground and the distance has been detected in the work of Degas, for example, in his *Musicians of the Orchestra* (1870-71, Frankfurt, Städtische Galerie im Städelschen Kunstinstitut) (64). Amishai-Maisels has suggested that Gauguin may have been inspired by the heads of praying women in stained-glass windows in a church (65), while Michael Hogg has suggested that the visionary scene of combat is an image on a wall, possibly projected by a magic lantern, like those used in the catechism (66). Despite the naivety of these hypotheses (in that they presume the need for a real situation as a model for the painting), the conjectures of these two scholars suggest a key point. The unique composition of the *Vision of the Sermon* does not in fact derive from Bernard's *Breton Women in the Meadow*, but rather from a painting by Gauguin that we have already looked at, painted long before Bernard arrived at Pont-Aven: *Breton Women at the Bend in the Road* (cat. xx). This group of peasant women on the road, with their traditional costume and headdresses in the foreground, anticipates almost literally the left half of the *Vision of the Sermon*.

Furthermore, the relationship between the women in the foreground and the calf slightly further in, with its disproportion of scale, is maintained in the *Vision*. One might say that *Breton Women at the Bend in the Road* was the dress-rehearsal for this strange relationship between figures and background, this effect of cinematographic transparency, this strange spatial division which produces the unreal feel of the *Vision of the Sermon*.

A religious painting

We still need to look at the most crucial difference between the *Vision of the Sermon* and *Breton Women in the Meadow*. While Bernard would try to brush over it years later, adding the sub-title of *The Pardon in Pont-Aven* to his painting in order to introduce a religious reference, his painting was in fact a simple genre scene, of the pastoral type. The *Vision of the Sermon*, in contrast, was conceived of as a religious painting. Gauguin confirmed this in a letter to Van Gogh: “I have just done a religious painting very badly but which was interesting to do and which I like. I want to give it to the church at Pont-Aven. Naturally they don’t want it [...] I think I have reached in the figures a great rustic and superstitious simplicity. [...] For me, in this painting, the landscape and the fight only exist in the imagination of the praying people after the sermon, hence the unnatural and disproportionate contrast between the real people and the fight in its landscape” (67).

At this point we encounter a strange *chiasmus*, an exchange of roles between the two artists. Bernard was a devout Catholic, inclined to mysticism. We know little of Gauguin’s beliefs, but up to the summer of 1888 he had not shown any signs of religious interests. However, it is Gauguin and not

Bernard who chooses a biblical motif and a supernatural apparition as his subject. Had Gauguin undergone some sort of conversion of the type so common at the end of the century, such as those of Barbey d'Aurevilly, Verlaine, Léon Bloy, Huysmans and Paul Bourget? Or is this in fact a swindle on the artist's part? Pissarro was inclined to the latter view: "Gauguin is not a soothsayer", he wrote in a letter to his son, "he is a trickster who has detected a retrograde movement on the part of the bourgeoisie, the result of the great ideas of solidarity that spring up in the people, an unconscious but fruitful idea and the only legitimate one! The Symbolists are just the same! What do you think? ... They have to be fought like the plague! (68).

If, as Pissarro thought, this was all a deliberate deceit, it has to be said that Gauguin took a lot of trouble over it. Not only did he go to the church at Pont-Aven to offer his painting, but, following its rejection, he then tried to donate it to the church at Nizon (where he went in the company of Bernard and other painter friends, such as Laval and Sérusier). Again he was unsuccessful. At that point he wrote to Theo van Gogh: "The church painting will be sent to you and you can exhibit it. Sadly, it is made for a church and what works there does not have the same effect as in this setting of stained glass, stones etc... as in a salon" (69). It has recently been pointed out that the technique used by Gauguin in the *Vision*, with wax as a binding agent for the thickest paint layers, suggesting religious and ancient paintings, was intended to give the work the character of an icon or cult image (70).

It is as exaggerated to assume a religious conversion as it is to think that Gauguin was attempting to perpetrate a fraud here. The spiritual background to the *Vision* is real and, like

its style and technique, ultimately derives from the artist's primitivist leanings. The key is to be found in Gauguin's words to Van Gogh quoted above: "I think that in the figures I have achieved a great rustic and superstitious simplicity" (71). The *Vision* was intended to be an expression of the *genius loci*, the ancestral spirit of Brittany, of that religious atavism which all contemporary writers referred to as one of the key characteristics of Breton peasants (72).

This apparent effort to become a sort of interpreter or medium of Breton *Volksgeist* does not imply, however, that Gauguin in any way sacrificed his pride as an artist. His efforts to give the painting to local churches rather suggests an emphasis on the omnipotent power of the artist, as if he felt himself capable of creating the gods of the community. Four years after the artist's death, the writer Victor Segalen wrote a story about Gauguin's life among the Maoris. His argument focused on the contrast between the destructive influence of civilisation and the redemptive influence of an artist over a dying race. In Segalen's story, Gauguin created some gods for the Maoris, which were so real and believable that the natives acknowledged them as their own (73). It is not impossible that Gauguin's had something like Segalen's idea in mind when he painted the *Vision of the Sermon*.

Creative power

The issue, then, is whether we can link the religious inspiration of the *Vision* to an exaltation of the creative power of the artist. In mid-August 1888, at the same time that Bernard arrived in Pont-Aven, Gauguin wrote a letter to his friend Schuffenecker that contained a sort of programmatic declaration: "A word of advice, don't copy too much from life – Art is an abstraction; take it from

nature, dreaming before it and think more about the creation than the result, it is the only way to ascend towards God, acting like our divine master, creating" (74). The analogy between the power of the artist and divine creation is presented in this passage as an antidote against aesthetic naturalism. Following this line of argument, the choice of a religious theme, and in particular of a supernatural apparition, as the subject of the *Vision*, acquires a new polemical meaning, opposing naturalism and Impressionism. Baudelaire had already maintained that the decline of religious art in bourgeois society was not due to a loss of faith on the part of the artists, but to the waning of their imagination, and he had recommended a *surnaturalisme* against all forms of realism (75).

Moreover, the subject matter of Gauguin's painting, the combat between Jacob and the Angel, could be interpreted as referring to artistic creation. It appears that Gauguin discovered the symbolic possibilities of this subject in the work of Victor Hugo. In Hugo's novel *Les Misérables*, which Gauguin was reading in early July 1888, the episode of Jacob's combat appears as a metaphor for man's internal struggle with his own conscience (76). Even more relevant, however, is the reference to Jacob and the angel in another book by Hugo, *Les Contemplations*. In a poem entitled "Insomnia" (in the third part of the book under the revealing heading "Combats and Dreams") the poet describes how an unknown spirit, a "mysterious master" awakens him in the middle of the night to oblige him to write, setting up a relationship between "the idea" and "the flesh", between the body and the soul: "and the angel clasped Jacob, and the soul supports the body" (77). Victor Merlès, who has compiled an index of allegorical interpretations of the fight between Jacob and the Angel, has

referred to the Romantic interpretation in which the story symbolises the struggle of the creative genius.[¿qué ha sido de la nota al pie?]

The *Vision of the Sermon* finally became the prototype of a new concept of painting which Gauguin (without formally defining it) baptised “synthetism” and which aimed to be a global alternative to Impressionism in painting. In 1891, the young poet and critic Gabriel-Albert Aurier published an essay in the *Mercure de France* entitled “Symbolism in Painting: Paul Gauguin”, which starts in fact with a lengthy and lyrical description of the *Vision of the Sermon*. The first part of Aurier’s text is a critique of the Impressionist aesthetics, which he sees as nothing more than another variant of realism, albeit a more subjective one: “Pissarro, Claude Monet, undoubtedly translate forms and colours in a way different to Courbet, but essentially, like Courbet, even more than Courbet, they only translate form and colour. The bedrock and underlying goal of their art is the material thing, the real thing”. Aurier goes on to set out a new programme: “In the eyes of the artist, in fact [...] objects cannot have value as objects. They can only appear to him as signs. They are the letters of a vast alphabet which only the man of genius can spell out. To write his thoughts, his poem, with these signs, remembering that the sign, as vital as it is, is nothing in itself, and that the idea is everything, this, then, is the artist’s task” (79). Aurier contrasts the perceptualist concept of painting with a semiotic one: he opposes the idea of painting as a register of visual sensations with the notion of painting as hieroglyphic, as the symbolic handwriting of ideas. His argument is basically determined by his intent to annex Gauguin’s pictorial ideas to a literary movement, Symbolism, which was starting to show signs of staleness by 1891. The title of the article itself is revealing in this sense, as

Aurier avoids the term “Synthetism” and reduces Gauguin’s contribution to that of the translation of poetic *Symbolism* into painting.

It is difficult to know how far Gauguin identified himself with the theoretical content of Aurier’s text; but he was certainly interested in its practical effect. Prior to his departure for Tahiti, the artist was courted, honoured and feted in the various Symbolist circles, including Mallarmé’s. The critic Fénéon wrote later that as a result Gauguin became “prisoner of the literati” (80). For his part, Pissarro explained to his son that Gauguin had “manoeuvred by low means to have himself chosen (that is the word) as a man of genius, and very adroitly” (81).

5. Eve and the Gods

There is one detail from the *Vision of the Sermon* which deserves comment in relation to the painting’s symbolic content. Two silhouettes in profile flank the group of women in the foreground like a pair of donors. The one on the right is a priest and that on the left a Breton woman who stands out from the other visionaries. Ziva Amishai-Maisels has convincingly argued that the figure of the priest is a self-portrait of Gauguin, while the woman on the right depicts Madeleine Bernard (82), sister of Émile, who had arrived with her mother in Pont-Aven around 14 August 1888. At that point Madeleine was 17, and had blue eyes, blond hair and an intelligent and expressive gaze. The “very beautiful and very mystic” Madeleine, as her brother described her, fell in love with Brittany. She loved to wear the traditional costume of Pont-Aven and to pray in the local church. “Naturally”, Bernard continued, “Gauguin, consoled by my sister, who had the character of a true saint and artist, fell in

love with her and considered running away with her, but my father intervened in time” (83). After M. Bernard put an end to the relationship, Gauguin wrote Madeleine a couple of letters in which his passion is sublimated into an offer of a purely spiritual friendship. For all these reasons, it would not be at all surprising if the figure of Madeleine was included in the *Vision* along with that of the artist, framing the symbolic combat in a sort of mystical marriage.

The presence of these two figures in the *Vision* opens up a new perspective on Gauguin’s later work. The inclusion of the artist himself in the picture anticipates a whole series of paintings in which Gauguin would combine his self-portrait with religious iconography: images in which he presents himself in the guise of the Redeemer, or the Tempter, the Messiah or the Anti-Christ, developing a personal mythology to suit his requirements. In addition, the figure of Madeleine, beyond the biographical anecdote, indicates the new role cast for women in the “symbolic way” that Gauguin had embarked upon. While his painting was already dominated by female figures, from the *Vision* onwards, woman would be the *intercessor* for establishing a relationship with the sacred, be it in a divine or a devilish form.

Perversity and irony

During the key weeks of the summer of 1888, Gauguin and Bernard both made portraits of Madeleine. Bernard painted her lying on the ground, in a dreamy, contemplative pose (cat. xx), and again in a more conventional half-length portrait (cat. xx). Both paintings include part of the Bois d’Amour converted into a sacred grove, a subject dear to the Symbolists and in perfect harmony with the sitter’s own mystical inclinations. However, Gauguin’s portrait of

Madeleine expresses very different thoughts. Her almond-shaped eyes, her slanted gaze, the insinuating smile and above all that pointed ear of a female faun (of the type we mentioned above in Gauguin's self-portrait) do not convey Bernard's idea of her as an innocent spiritual creature, but rather show her as a wily seductress and a somewhat perverted young woman.

This perversity which Gauguin saw in Madeleine can undoubtedly be linked to the Symbolist fascination for the *femme fatale* found in both literature and art. Beyond any specific moral content, however, this perversity is the expression of a shift in the direction of Gauguin's imagery, which, in line with his new "symbolic way", would systematically explore the concept of irony, using *antiphrasis*, the inversion of the literal or normal meaning of images. The same irony that Gauguin used in his confrontation with Bernard would reappear in his pictorial dialogue with Van Gogh during the months they spent together in Arles, once again in relation to the female portrait. Marie Ginoux, wife of the owner of the Café de la Gare (where Van Gogh had rented a room between May and September), agreed to be painted by the two artists, and one day in early November she presented herself at the Yellow House dressed in her traditional costume of Arles. During the hour in which she posed for them, Van Gogh painted a rapid and hasty oil sketch. Soon after, he executed a second and more highly elaborated version of the subject, which is the painting that interests us here. The silhouette of *The Arlesienne* (cat. xx), with its concave outlines, reveals the influence of both Japanese prints and the typical costume of the Breton women as seen in the *Vision of the Sermon*. On the table are some books (novels) which were normal accessories in Van Gogh's paintings, symbolising the spiritual preoccupations

of the modern age. Van Gogh's Madame Ginoux, with her hand on her cheek and her distant gaze, represents the melancholy and tormented soul of a modern woman.

In contrast to the *seriousness* of this portrait, the drawing which Gauguin made at the same time gives the sitter a certain insinuating charm (cat. xx). This drawing is not intended as an independent work: rather it is one of those documents which the artist used in his compositions. Gauguin inserted it into a painting which represented the same night-time café that Van Gogh had already painted but "with figures seen in the brothels" (84). In this painting Madame's Ginoux's expression has been subtly modified and now has an enigmatic and spiteful smile. Dominating the scene as the owner of the café, she is surrounded by the tendrils of smoke that suggest the murky and sordid atmosphere of the bar. Behind her, at the other tables are some of the local people of Arles whom Van Gogh had portrayed, such as lieutenant Milliet or the famous M. Roulin, seated in the company of three prostitutes. Once again, moral perversity is no more than the effect of irony, capable of subverting the meaning of any image through a change in a figure or its context, however minimal.

During the Arles period, Gauguin's irony was directed above all against Van Gogh's innocent optimism and enthusiasm, but also, in an oblique way, against the bucolic universe that Gauguin himself had constructed in Brittany. In contrast to its bright luminosity he projected a dense web of shadows: suggestions of mysteries, suspicions, threats. In the painting *The Blue Trees* (cat. xx), the combination of blue trunks and yellow sky recalls Van Gogh's *Fallen Leaves, Alyscamps* (1888), which decorated Gauguin's bedroom in the Yellow House. However, while Van Gogh used his trees to frame a pair of

lovers, Gauguin uses them as the setting for an uncertain, troubling relationship (85). The mysterious couple whom he depicts as semi-hidden among the trees comprises a working man in a cap and blue blouse, represented with his hands in his pockets and his legs separated, and a small local woman who walks along slightly bent, as if trying to slip away unnoticed. The troubling sensation that the scene arouses is confirmed by the title which Gauguin gave the painting when it was exhibited in Brussels in February 1889: *Vous y passerez, la belle* ("Your turn will come, pretty one").

The ironic revision of pastoral clichés could acquire notably different tones. *The Washerwomen* (cat. xx) was Gauguin's second canvas on a subject which Van Gogh had already treated. Starting from an innocent, harmless pretext, he took pleasure in creating an almost indecipherable composition, filled with visual and narrative enigmas. Hovering over the woman washing is the disturbing figure of a bent old woman who casts a large and seemingly living shadow. In the foreground is a goat who seems like a pet. The old woman is the origin of an entire series of hooded silhouettes which culminate in the *tupapaus*, the terrifying apparitions in Gauguin's Tahiti paintings. What magic spell is this figure preparing? The painter Daniel de Monfreid, one of Gauguin's last close friends, simply stated: "There is no subject in this painting, but the colours sound out a powerful fanfare, and the figures, with their simplified drawing, have so little of the human that they must be from another mysterious and terrible world" (86).

Van Gogh himself also saw Gauguin's artistic personality as shrouded in an air of mystery. In late November 1888, Van Gogh executed two still lifes which functioned as two symbolic portraits of himself and his companion, using a

familiar symbol which he was particularly attracted to – that of the empty chair. Van Gogh's chair, with its straight legs and back and the lone accessory of the pipe and tobacco, is intended to express a rough, simple, manly character. In contrast, Gauguin's armchair (cat. xx) (which Van Gogh had bought specially for him) is represented with curving, enveloping lines. The curves were intended to harmonise with Gauguin's room, which Van Gogh had wanted to decorated like “a boudoir of a really artistic woman” (87). Two novels lie on the chair, symbols of the poetic gifts that Van Gogh considered Gauguin to be such a master of. In contrast to the daytime clarity that bathes Van Gogh's chair, in the depiction of Gauguin's armchair the lighted candle and the lamp on the wall create a night-time atmosphere. The range of greens and reds is comparable to the atmosphere of another painting by Van Gogh, his *Night Café*, which aimed to evoke night-time figures and emotions.

Interlude: the *Suite Volpini*

On his return to Paris at Christmas 1888, following his adventure in Arles, Gauguin created a series of prints using the zincograph technique which Émile Bernard had tried out some months previously. The resulting album would be shown in the exhibition which Gauguin and his friends organised in the spring in the Café des Arts (owned by a certain Volpini), located inside the 1889 Universal Exhibition complex, and with the title of “Exhibition of the Impressionist and Synthetist Group”. The *Suite Volpini*, which consists of scenes of Brittany, Martinique and Arles, has always troubled scholars in its apparent lack of thematic unity. For Caroline Boyle-Turner, the suite is a sample of various themes taken from earlier works, a sort of “showcase” which Gauguin designed in order to sell his

recent paintings (88). With regard to a linking thread in the set, Boyle-Turner only ventures a vague one: “the idea of people as a reflection of their environment” (89). Richard Brettell has emphasised certain aspects of the *Suite Volpini* which differentiate it from a merely reproductive and commercial project. For Brettell, the prints are not based literally on earlier paintings (except in a couple of cases), but are rather very free reinterpretations. When suggesting an overall interpretation for the suite, Brettell is not as adventurous, limiting himself to an interesting list: “images of transgression, growth, nudity, adolescence, old age, prayer, desperate cleanliness and spoiled paradise. At each level, the world represented is compromised by doubt, and Gauguin’s cover reveals that doubt in a self-conscious way” (90). More recently, Douglas Druick and Peter Kort Zegers summarised the content of the series as touching on the issues of “sexuality, good and evil, innocence and guilt” (91).

Venturing to go beyond these ideas and to suggest a unified interpretation of the Volpini album, we might say that the suite is in fact a *compendium of the pastoral world and its fall*. Leaving aside for the moment the cover, the other 10 images in the set are clearly divided into two equal and symmetrical groups of 5 images each. The first of these, consisting of three prints of Brittany (*Pleasures of Brittany*, *Breton Bathers*, *Breton Women by a Fence*) and two of Martinique (*Martinique Pastorals* and *Grasshoppers and Ants*), is apparently devoted to an exaltation of the bucolic life. The other group consists of 5 mysterious, sombre or tragic images which act as the dark side of the pastoral: the two prints devoted to *The Dramas of the Sea* in Brittany, and the three on subjects from Arles: *Old Women from Arles*, *The Washerwomen* and *Human Miseries*.

The *Suite Volpini* thus depicts the dialectic of the pastoral and the anti-pastoral, of idyll and tragedy. However, the marvellous complexity of the series is not exhausted in this initial suggestion, and once again we need to consider Gauguin's use of ironic devices. In the group of "positive" prints, the artist introduces some subtle alterations with regard to the original paintings, confusing their meanings. For example, in *Pleasures of Brittany* (cat. xx) the two dancing girls, derived from the *Dance of the Breton Girls*, have changed appearance radically. Now they seem to wear masks that transform them into monstrous, primitive creatures, almost forerunners of the *Demoiselles d'Avignon*. In *Breton Bathers* (cat. xx), the figure of the woman entering the water, taken from the painting of *The two Bathers*, is now outlined against the background of an ominous black cloud, like a great cloud of smoke. In *Grasshoppers and Ants* (cat. xx), the moralising fable that contrasts idleness and work corrupts the purity of the surroundings.

Finally, the print on the cover (a design for a plate individualised by hand-colouring with watercolour and gouache) is a sort of emblem summarising the paradoxes within the album. The apparently simple image in fact condenses a complex process of iconographic elaboration with three different phases. The first stage, underlying the image, is a representation of a young country girl with a goose, a characteristic motif in the Brittany paintings. In a second stage, this pastoral motif becomes the mythological scene of Leda and the swan (with two small swans alluding to the Dioscuri). But the association does not end here: the elegant curve of the swan's neck suggests a small snake winding around the edge of the roundel. This is the biblical Serpent, whose appearance (completed by an apple) turns Leda into Eve, and the erotic pagan image into a Christian

one of the Fall. The ironic and perverse sense of the transformation is underlined by the motto (written in reverse) of the Order of the Garter: “Homis [sic] soit qui mal y pense”, meaning “Evil be to him who evil thinks”.

Eve

It is in fact this image of Eve at the moment of Temptation that would be the pivot for a large number of Gauguin's works in 1889, acting as a veritable symbol of the crisis of the pastoral. One of the most interesting works exhibited at the Café Volpini was a small pastel of Eve beneath the Tree of Knowledge and the serpent, with an inscription in Creole, the language of the natives of Martinique: *Pas écouter li li menteur* (Do not listen to the liar). The figure of that Breton Eve was taken from a “poor wretched woman” (in Gauguin's words) who appears with her head leaning on her hands in the middle of the harvest in his painting *Human miseries*, painted in Arles (92). If this figure represents a seduced and abandoned peasant, as it would seem to, in his Breton Eve Gauguin decided to raise the anecdotal, genre element to the timeless dignity of myth. The hands on the face in *Human miseries* have combined with the foetal position of a Peruvian mummy which the artist had seen in Paris in the Ethnographical Museum in the Trocadero. Thus modified, like a symbol of the link between temptation, sin and death, the image reappears in the painting *Life and Death* (1889) (cat. xx).

Various elements link *Life and Death* to another painting of this period, initially titled *In the Waves* but later exhibited as *A Painting (Ondine)*. The particular importance of this work for Gauguin can be appreciated in the way he selected it as the background for a self-portrait painted that same year

(cat. xx). *In the Waves* has been related to nudes by Degas and Delacroix, but if one had to find a single precedent, it would be the figure of one of the nereids that welcome the ship in the *Landing of Marie de Medici in Marseilles* by Rubens. Obviously, the powerful volumes of the figure's back in Rubens' work have been flattened, creating a silhouette laminated against the decorative design of the waves. The waving, fluid movement of the nereid has become a broken line, and the overflowing voluptuousness a more uncertain, mysterious kind of eroticism. The secret of this eroticism lies in the unrealistic pose: it has been said that the figure in *In the Waves* is eating her own arm. This pose reappears, albeit more frontally, in the relief *Mysterious Thirsts* (1890), which conveys a stronger impression of a limb penetrating the open mouth, suggesting a barely concealed act of fellatio.

We can now return to the painting *Nude Breton Boy*, which we contrasted earlier with the bathers of 1888. Although it has never previously been suggested, it seems highly likely that *In the Waves* and *Breton Boy* constitute a pair, forming a sort of diptych. Painted around the same time, on canvases of the same format, the two paintings have the same flat green backgrounds (the sea and the grass respectively), decorated with white (the crests of the waves and the sheet). Against this background the nude figure is stretched out diagonally, with its limbs arranged in unnatural positions. *In the Waves* and *Breton Boy* could be read as two complementary visions, the two faces of a single fantasy of sexual submission.

Lesser gods

The 1889 Universal Exhibition was held on the Champs de Mars, at the foot of Eiffel's *Three hundred metre Tower*. It celebrated colonial conquests in pavilions devoted to the

remotest regions of Asia and the Pacific, allowing Gauguin to make the fascinating discovery of Indian, Cambodian and Javanese art (93). In the following months, the impact of that encounter would make its mark on a series of works which combined eroticism and religious symbolism. The first of these works is a watercolour, a mysterious image presided over by the word “Ictus” and the pictogram of a fish (cat. xx). Both signs, the image and the word (the Greek acrostic that refers to Christ) were suggested to Gauguin by a letter from Van Gogh (94). The androgynous female nude that appears between the two signs combines elements of various cult religions. Seated in a semi-lotus position, one of her arms stretches out in a Buddhist gesture, while the other evokes the crucifixion. The work testifies to the attraction Gauguin felt for religious syncretism and esoteric theories (such as theosophy) which the painter would develop systematically in Polynesia, both in his art and his writings. In the text *The Catholic Church and Modern Times* (1897-98; subsequently reworked with the title *The Modern Spirit and Catholicism*) Gauguin emphasised the coincidences between Christian doctrine and Egyptian, Persian, Hindu, Chinese and, naturally, Tahitian beliefs (95).

Religious and artistic syncretism are both to be found in two statuettes. These are fetish-like figures of erotic divinities with connotations of perversity. *Lust* (1890) (cat. xx) is the second version of a statuette which broke, and which can be related to the painting *Nude with Sunflowers* (1889) that formed part of the decoration painted by Gauguin for the dining-room of Marie Henry's inn at Le Pouldu. The pose of the slim figure is inspired by the *mudrás* or symbolic poses of the Javanese dancers that had so fascinated Gauguin (and Rodin) at the 1889 Universal Exhibition, and by figures from the reliefs at Angkor Vat reproduced in plaster in the

Cambodian pavilion. In contrast to the sinuous sensuality of *Lust*, the so-called *Black Venus* (cat. xx) represents an opposing female ideal, massive and opulent. Their sources are, however, almost the same: the hieratic pose, the hairstyle, the long earrings, the bracelets and the bands around the body were inspired by a photograph of an ancient Javanese sculpture of Vishnu. Gauguin, however, introduces an unexpected feature. A lotus flower climbs around the goddess's leg, comparable to the phallic cobra that symbolises fecundity. The stem springs from a decapitated head which the goddess, like a sinister Salome, holds in her lap: a head that clearly bears the features of Gauguin.

Self-portrait as Christ

The self-portrait included in the *Black Venus* sets the image of the artist within a primitive, religious context, a strategy already announced in the *Vision of the Sermon*. However, the full identification of the artist with the god, the theomorphic self-portrait (a genre whose precedents ran from Dürer to Courbet) would only appear in Gauguin's painting with his *Christ on the Mount of Olives* (cat. xx), of June 1889. The choice of that particular gospel episode may have been inspired by various sources. Firstly, by Breton crucifixion groups, which always included a representation of *The Agony in the Garden*. In addition, the subject was favoured by Romantic poets (such as Lamartine and Musset, Vigny and Gerard de Nerval) and painters (including Goya, Delacroix and Corot). For the most radical of these artists, the anguish of Jesus revealed not just his human condition, but also the absence or inexistence of God. The figure of the desperate, defeated Jesus was a powerful metaphor for the tragic condition of the poet or the modern artist. In October 1889 (i.e. after

Gauguin had painted the *Christ on the Mount of Olives*), Aurier expanded on this subject in his poem “La montagne de doute”, in which the poet appears as a Christ-Prometheus figure condemned to be crucified for having given the holy wine to the people (96). Gauguin’s painting is inspired by this attitude, and evokes a number of passages from his letters in which the painter exalts Christ as the supreme artist (“What an artist, this Christ who has sculpted in all humanity!”) (97) and compares the suffering of the modern painter to that of Christ’s Passion (“What a long calvary is the life of the artist!”) (98). Not even in a context such as this, however, does Gauguin refrain from introducing an element of irony. His Jesus’s most notable feature is the red hair, a stigma traditionally associated with Judas: thus in a single figure he paradoxically represents both betrayer and betrayed (99).

The use of red hair was also an allusion to Gauguin’s friend Van Gogh, a justifiable one in that Gauguin knew that his friend had preceded him in an attempt to depict the subject of the Agony in the Garden. Between June and July 1888 and again at the end of the year, Van Gogh had executed two studies on this theme which featured Christ and an angel. He destroyed them immediately afterwards, however, alleging that he did not wish to paint figures of any importance without a model (100). When Van Gogh came across Gauguin and Bernard’s efforts at biblical subjects (Bernard having painted his own *Christ on the Mount of Olives* later in 1889), he took issue with them. For Van Gogh, Bernard and Gauguin’s religious paintings were no more than an artificial return to medieval tapestries and primitive paintings, comparable to the Pre-Raphaelites’ anaemic figures. Van Gogh contrasted the only healthy religious painting that he knew, that of Rembrandt and Delacroix,

with these decadent inventions. As if to confirm this thesis, in September 1889, Van Gogh painted his own theomorphic self-portrait in the form of a modified version of Delacroix's *Pietà*.

But the true alternative that Van Gogh offered to Gauguin and Bernard's icons was completely different. In a letter to Bernard written from the asylum at Saint-Rémy where he was interned, Van Gogh described to him a landscape that he had painted of the garden there. This was an allegorical landscape with a great destroyed tree, and Van Gogh explained that "to give an impression of anguish, one can aim to do so without aiming directly at the historical garden of Gesthemane" (101). Over the course of the summer and autumn of 1889, Van Gogh systematically painted olive trees in the surrounding area. In November he wrote to his brother: "This month I have worked in the olive groves, as they (Gauguin and Bernard) made me furious with their Christs in the garden, where there is nothing observed. In my case of course it is not a question of doing anything from the Bible, and I have written to Bernard and also to Gauguin that I believe our duty is thinking and not dreaming, and for that reason I was so astonished by their work, and that they had let themselves go in that direction" (102). Van Gogh's obstinate resistance to biblical subjects has been attributed to his agitated state resulting from his mental illness, during which he suffered periods of crisis with religious visions and anxieties. However, the artist's attitude coincides perfectly with that of another painter working in Provence, the elderly Paul Cézanne. Years later Cézanne confided to his friend Joachim Gasquet: "You will remember what Jacobo de Voragine had to say, that on the night on which the Saviour was born all the vines flowered in Palestine [...] We, the

painters, should paint these vines flowering rather than the clouds of trumpeting angels announcing the Messiah” (103).

It is almost impossible not to see Van Gogh’s reaction to Gauguin’s *Christ on the Mount of Olives* as a sort of poetic justice: as Gauguin had subjected various icons of his friend Vincent to a sort of ironic deconstruction, so Van Gogh’s response was to some extent a dose of his own medicine. We might see an irresistible and involuntary irony in these olive trees that claim to be Agonies in the Garden without Christ or angels, religious paintings but ones stripped of biblical allusions.

6. In the wake of Gauguin: from Pont-Aven to the Nabis

“After Manet, he [Gauguin] is the French painter who has been most influential. What Manet was to the generation of 1870, Gauguin was to that of 1890” (104). These words of Maurice Denis are witness to the strangest paradox that we can associate with Gauguin: that a painter so radically individualist became something like the founder of a school. It is difficult to decide how much was involuntary and how much deliberate in this paradox. On the one hand, Gauguin exuded a personal charisma which attracted young artists. But on the other, it appears that he soon grasped the benefits which that charisma could bring him within the context of his difficult professional circumstances. Gauguin appreciated that the degree of recognition of his own work depended to some extent on the disciples which he managed to recruit. During his first stay in Brittany in 1886, Gauguin already boasted of being the most hated and the most admired among the Pont-Aven artists’ colony, of the arguments which he provoked, and how the other painters debated the words of advice he offered (105). Pissarro

sarcastically commented that Gauguin preached in Brittany, with a following of young men who listened to him like a master: Gauguin had achieved enormous influence with his commendable labour “in the art of creating sects” (106).

Starting with his very first followers whom he found in Pont Aven in 1886 – Charles Laval and a certain Puigadeau, nicknamed “Picolo” – Gauguin’s band would grow on his successive return trips to Brittany. First there was Émile Bernard, who never wished to be a disciple of Gauguin, but an equal, and later numerous others, some of them locals such as Armand Séguin and Maxime Maufra, and others from farther away, such as the Dutch artists Jacob Meyer de Haan and Jan Verkade, the Englishman Robert Bevan and the Irishman Roderic O’Conor, among others. Although the term Pont-Aven School has survived, it was in fact a varied and incoherent group which never really became a school, as its members dispersed every time Gauguin disappeared from the scene (as he did in 1891 and again in 1895). Some of his followers in Brittany abandoned their emulation of the master to return to their earlier pictorial styles, while others joined a new and more stable group established in Paris around the figure of Paul Sérusier.

Experiments and decoration

In the summer of 1888 – according to an anecdote that has been repeated to the point of cliché – the young Sérusier, an intellectually avid student painter, visited the village of Pont-Aven. There he met Gauguin and became interested in his new ideas on painting. In the nearby Bois d’Amour, on a small panel, Sérusier painted a landscape following Gauguin’s instructions. Gauguin apparently asked Sérusier: “How do you see that tree? [...] Is it green? Well put green,

the most beautiful green on your palette; and that shadow, more like blue? Don't hesitate to paint it as blue as possible" (107).

When Sérusier returned to Paris, he showed the panel to his fellow students at the Académie Julian (Maurice Denis, Pierre Bonnard, Paul Ranson, and Henri-Gabriel Ibels), who received it as a revelation. With his reputation as an erudite polyglot (he was said to command Latin, Arabic and Hebrew), philosopher and theologian, Sérusier became the guru to a group of young artists. They took the name of Nabis, deriving from the Hebrew word meaning "prophets". This initial group of painters associated with the Académie Julian subsequently expanded to include Édouard Vuillard and Ker-Xavier Roussel (former companions of Denis in the Lycée Condorcet), while later arrivals included the Swiss artist Félix Vallotton, and the Hungarian Rippl-Ronaï, and the sculptors Lacombe and Maillol. Half in jest and half seriously, the prophets adopted the paraphernalia of a secret society or mystic brotherhood: they wore oriental costumes, wrote letters in a pompous, archaic style, and invented new names for themselves: Sérusier was the *nabi à la barde rutilante*, Denis the *nabi aux belles icones*, Bonnard the *nabi japponnard*, and Vuillard the *nabi zouave*.

Among the young initiates, the small landscape which they called the *Talisman* provoked a veritable outburst of experiments, from Denis' *Patches of Sunlight on the Terrace* (1890) (cat. xx) with its almost unrecognisable setting, to Vuillard's *Octagonal Self-portrait* (1890) (cat. xx) and *Lilacs* (1890) (cat. xx), and Roussel's *The Fisherman* (1890-91) (cat. xx). These small-format paintings, flat and almost abstract in style, were experiments in pure colour as a means of translating sensations onto the picture plane. These

experiments, whose radical nature would not be surpassed until the arrival of Fauvism or that of abstract painting, literally illustrated the famous inaugural definition offered by the theoretician of the group, Maurice Denis, in 1890: “Remember that a painting – before it is a horse or a battle, a naked woman or a story of any type – is essentially a flat surface covered with colours arranged in a certain order” (108).

Later, throughout the 1890s, these experiments would be replaced by large format compositions of declared decorative intent. The Nabis were fascinated by early Renaissance Italian frescoes, Japanese screens, and by Puvis de Chavannes’ large allegorical compositions, and had read Aurier’s article in which he praised Gauguin’s abilities as a decorative painter. Sérusier fostered the primacy of large-scale mural painting, and produced his *Triptych* (cat. xx). Denis, Bonnard, Vuillard and Roussel embarked on large commissions for the homes of their wealthy patrons and protectors. However, the tendency towards decoration was also evident in their easel works, in Denis’ famous *Madame Ranson with a Cat* (1892) (cat. xx) or *The Muses* (cat. xx), in which the sacred grove has been domesticated and become an elegant private park. Some of the Nabis, such as Lacombe and Maillol, were literally inspired by works by Gauguin, submitting them to a new process of decorative simplification.

The contrast between the early colour experiments on a small scale and the large decorative compositions, so characteristic of the overall evolution of the Nabi group, is perfectly reflected in the two artistic principles set out by the group’s theoretician, Maurice Denis: *subjective deformation* and *objective deformation*. The principle of subjective deformation

or theory of the equivalents affirms that “the emotions or states of mind provoked by whatever spectacle” arouse “in the artist’s imagination signs or visual equivalents capable of reproducing those emotions or states of mind” without the need to reproduce the initial spectacle” (109). In the name of expression that principle authorised all intensification or exaggeration (of colour, physiognomies, etc.,) to the point of caricature. However, as a necessary “corrective” to these expressionist excesses, and as a compensation for them, Denis added another principle, that of objective deformation, which imposed on the artist the need for a “decorative, aesthetic and rational composition”, and obliged him to “transpose everything into Beauty” (110).

Two trends

The core group of the Nabis was profoundly imbued with spiritual interests: Sérusier managed to combine theosophy and Christianity, Maurice Denis was a fervent Catholic, while Ranson was passionately interested in esoteric doctrines, all three turning to religious and archaic symbolic subjects remote from the modern world. Other Nabis, however, were less interested in such matters: Bonnard and Vuillard painted street scenes, parks and domestic interiors. These painters were not interested in abstract speculations, but in their own perceptions. Their sense of modern life set them apart from any nostalgic, archaising recreation. They looked to Japanese art, to Degas and Lautrec, admiring their capacity for observation, their manner of representing certain movements and gestures synthetically, and their feeling for modern life.

In March 1899, as the Nabis decade was reaching an end, Maurice Denis characterised the two tendencies into which

the group had divided itself in words that also testify to the rupture brought about in French culture as a result of the “Dreyfus Affair”. The first of these two trends, represented by Sérusier, Ranson and Denis himself, could be distinguished by its inclination towards pure colours, a symbolic emphasis, the importance given to the human figure and, in general, by a simplicity of “Latin taste”. The other trend, represented by Vuillard and Bonnard, inclined towards darker tones, towards images observed from life, was less interested in the figures and in drawing, and tended towards complication, in a reflection of “Semite taste” (111).

However, the gap between the two halves of the Nabi group, between Catholic and Jewish members, religious and secular, archaic and modern, speculative and observing types, had not been as visible or as evident at the start of the decade as these later reflections suggest. While Denis in his painting cultivated muses and fairies, Annunciations and the holy women at the sepulchre, he remained apart in his theories from any complicity with idealising Symbolism as represented, for example, by Albert Aurier. In his “Notes on Religious Painting” (1896), Denis maintained that synthetism or pictorial Symbolism was not born from any idealising theory, but was rather the “immediate result of positivist philosophies”, and that it was “the most strictly scientific artistic tendency”: “Those who began it were the landscape painters, the still life painters, and absolutely not the ‘painters of the soul’” (112). In addition, we should add that Denis’s famous definition of a painting, quoted above, came close (as its author later acknowledged) to the one proposed by Taine, the patron saint of aesthetic positivism in his *Philosophy of Art*: “A painting is a coloured surface in which the different tones and different degrees of light are distributed with a certain criteria” (113).

Bonnard, Vuillard and mystery

In addition, Bonnard and Vuillard, despite their apparent segregation, fully shared the spirit of the Nabis. Maurice Denis maintained that Bonnard unconsciously and effortlessly applied the complimentary principles of “subjective deformation” and “objective deformation” (114). Expressive difference and decorativeness converge in the early work of Bonnard and Vuillard and both painters transformed people and everyday things into sinuous, graceful, dancing silhouettes imbued with both dazzling ornamental qualities and with a kind of phantasmal spirit. This is the case, for example, with a composition such as *Dogs playing* (cat. xx) by Bonnard. The painter’s interest in the children and small animals goes hand in hand with a tendency to give the inanimate elements the appearance of living beings. An example of this is *Woman putting on her Stockings* (1893) (cat. xx), by the same artist, in which the stocking breaks free from the woman and becomes a living creature, a sort of snake. Bonnard and Vuillard’s silhouettes, submerged in shadow or bathed in lamp-light, have something of ghosts, or *revenants*. In Vuillard’s *Woman in an Interior* (1893) (cat. xx) the head retains some volume but it is attached to a body which is pure, insubstantial shadow.

All of Vuillard’s work is a *voyage autour de ma chambre*. However, this focus on the intimate is not an exaltation of comfort, of the predicted order, of domestic routine. For the artist, the bourgeois interior is the least familiar and strangest domain, a jungle that needs to be explored. “I had the feeling” André Gide wrote in *Les Cahiers d’André Walter*, “of seeing only the half of things. I believed that the others had been initiated into rituals that they hid from me because I

was too young. When I entered, conversations would cease in my presence: at times I came across signs that I was the only one who did not understand, and sometimes when I went to bed, I suspected that mysterious things happened while I was sleeping" (115). Vuillard's interiors also suggest these sensations: low-voiced conversations, stifled complaints, murmurings, a feeling of the unsaid and the secret all around.

This manner of representing everyday people and objects is fully in line with the central thesis of literary Symbolism which took allusion or suggestion as the key to poetic diction. "To name an object", wrote Mallarmé in his famous reply to Jules Huret's survey, "is to take away three-quarters of the pleasure of the poem, which consists of the pleasure of gradually becoming aware: to *suggest*, that it the dream. The symbol constitutes the perfect use of that mystery: to gradually evoke an object in order to reveal a state of mind, or, in contrast, to select an object and extract a state of mind from it through a series of decipherings" (116). Many years before, almost at the outset of his career, Gauguin had written a simpler phrase: "Poetry begins where mystery is born" (117).

In 1892, when Gauguin had already left Europe for the islands of the Pacific, Paul Ranson referred to him as "The Nabi on a mission in Tahiti" (118). In the meantime, the exiled artist wrote in a suspicious, untrusting tone about his followers. Recalling how earlier critics had taken him as a disciple of Anquetin and Bernard, he predicted: "Tomorrow I will turn into a follower of Bernard and Sérusier" (119). Gauguin suspected that Sérusier wished to replace him as master and he renounced "the whole Sérusier, Denis and company lot" (120). Nonetheless, leaving aside paranoid

suspicions, Gauguin had a basic confidence in his artistic heirs. In his discussion of the “music of the painting” that appears in his last text, *Raccontars de rapin*, Gauguin firmly states: “Bonnard, Vuillard, Sérusier, to mention some young artists, are musicians and you can be sure that coloured painting is entering a musical phase” (121). Despite all his suspicions, at the end of his life, Gauguin valued his legacy as a teacher higher than his own work. In his last letters from the Marquesas Islands, he confessed to his friend Monfreid: “You know what I have long wished to establish: the *right* to risk everything. My abilities [...] have not brought about great results, but the machine is set in motion. The public owes me nothing as my pictorial work is only relatively good, but the painters who are now benefiting from that freedom owe me something” (122).

Footnotes

1. “Le plus terrible cannibale n'est rien comparé à un propriétaire danois.” Letter to Pissarro, end of May 1885, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*. Victor Merlès ed. Fondation Singer-Polignac, Paris, 1984, vol. I, p. 108.
2. “Ma femme la famille tout le monde enfin me met sur le dos cette maudite peinture prétendant que c'est une honte de ne pas gagner sa vie. Mais les facultés d'un homme ne peuvent suffire à 2 choses et moi je nepuis faire q'une chose peindre.” Letter to Pissarro, end of May 1885, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 108.
3. Pola Gauguin: *Paul Gauguin mon père*. Les éditions de France, Paris, 1938, p. 82.
4. “Vous êtes parisianiste. Et à moi la campagne. J'aime la Bretagne, j'y trouve le sauvage, le primitif. Quand mes sabots résonnent sur ce sol de granit, j'entends le ton

sourd, mat et puissant que je cherche en peinture..." Letter to Schuffenecker, end of February or beginning of March 1888, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 172.

5. In the catalogue raisonné of Gauguin's paintings, the painting entitled *Autoportrait à Lezaven* is dated to the spring of 1888 in Lezaven, Brittainy (Daniel Wildenstein: *Gauguin. Premier itinéraire d'un sauvage. Catalogue de l'oeuvre peint (1873-1888)*. Text and research Sylvie Crussard. Documentation and chronology Martine Heudron. Skira / Seuil / Wildenstein Institute, 2001). According to Douglas W. Druick and Peter Kort Zegers, it was painted in December 1888 in Arles (*Van Gogh and Gauguin. The Studio of the South*. The Art Institute of Chicago - Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam. Thames & Hudson, 2001, pp. 247 and 390-91.)
6. "Vincent m'appelle quelquefois l'homme qui vient de loin et qui ira loin." Letter to Schuffenecker, around 20 December 1888, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 306.
7. Douglas W. Druick and Peter Kort Zegers: *Van Gogh and Gauguin. The Studio of the South*, p. 247.
8. Gilles Manceron: "Segalen et Gauguin", in *Gauguin. Actes du colloque Gauguin*. Musée d'Orsay, 11-13 January 1989. La Documentation Française, Paris, 1991, p. 47
9. "Par extraordinaire je lui ai mis un titre français: Pastorales tahitiennes; ne trouvant pas en canaque un titre correspondant." Letter to Monfreid, end of December 1892, *Lettres de Paul Gauguin à Daniel de Monfreid*. Précédées d'un hommage par Victor Segalen. Georges Crès, Paris, 1919, p. 103.
10. See exhib. cat. *Places of Delight. The Pastoral Landscape*. The Phillips Collection in association with the National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1988.

11. "Review of Exhibitions of Hyman Bloom, David Smith, and Robert Motherwell", *The Nation*, 26 January 1946. Republ. in Greenberg: *The Collected Essays and Criticism*. 1939-1969. The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 1986-1993, vol. 2, p. 51.
12. Greenberg: *Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 2, p. 52.
13. Lawrence Gowing: "The Modern Vision", in the cited cat., *Places of Delight. The Pastoral Landscape*, p. 238.
14. Ibid.
15. "Puisse venir le jour (et peut-être bientôt) où j'irai m'enfuir dans les bois sur une île de l'Océanie, vivre là d'extase, de calme et d'art." Letter to Mette, February 1890, *Lettres de Gauguin à sa femme et à ses amis*. Recueillies, annotées et préfacées par Maurice Malingue. Nouvelle édition. Bernard Grasset, Paris, 1946, reprinted. 1998, p. 184.
16. "Dans un paysage de Corot, il y a des arbres, des lierres, des eaux limpides où les nymphes viennent se baigneur à leur aise. Les nymphes de Corot dansent en nymphes et non pas comme des mortelles d'aujourd'hui, Tout pousse avec sérenité et recueillement et les eaux profondes n'ont jamais noyé personne. Toute l'âme de Corot a passé dans ses paysages; l'air respire la bonté, tandis que ses troncs d'arbres élancés y respirant la grâce et la noblesse. Il a compris la Grèce avec ses joies tirées de la nature." Letter to Schuffenecker, around 20 December 1888, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 306.
17. "Quelquefois je me suis reculé bien loin, plus loin que les chevaux du Parthénon... jusqu'au dada de mon enfance, le bon cheval de bois. / Je me suis attardé aux nymphes de Corot dansant dans les bois sacrés de Ville-d'Avray." Gauguin: *Avant et après* [1902-1903]. Preface by Jean-Marie Dallet. Éditions de La Table Ronde, Paris, 1994, p. 33.

18. “Ces nymphes, je les veux perpétuer... et il les a perpétuées, cet adorable Mallarmé; gaies, vigilantes d'amour, de chair et de vie, près du lierre qui enlace à Ville d'Avray les grands chênes de Corot, aux teintes dorées, d'odeur animale, pénétrantes; saveurs tropicales ici comme ailleurs, de tous les temps, jusque dans l'éternité.” Gauguin: *Avant et après*, p. 236.
19. Samuel Johnson, “Pastoral Poetry I,” *Rambler* #36, July 21, 1750, republished in *Eighteenth Century Critical Essays*, ed. Scott Elledge. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1961, 11, 579.
20. Vojtěch Jirat-Wasiutyski and H. Travers Newton, Jr.: *Technique and Meaning in the Paintings of Paul Gauguin*. Cambridge University Press, **2000**.
21. “Or, si l'on examine l'art de Pissarro dans son ensemble malgré ses fluctuations [...] on y trouve non seulement une excessive volonté artistique qui ne se dément jamais, mais encore un art essentiellement intuitif de belle race. [...] Il a regardé tout le monde, dites-vous! Pourquoi pas? Tout le monde l'a regardé aussi mais le renie. Ce fut un de mes maîtres et je ne le renie pas.” *Racontars de rapin* [1902]. Editions Sauret, Monaco, 1993, pp. 30-31.
22. “Bien loin d'exprimer l'âme et la vie des paysans comme fit Millet [...], il les observa avec la curiosité d'un Gauguin avide d'exotisme.” “Camille Pissarro” [1903], in Denis: *Le Ciel et l'Arcadie*. Textes réunis, présentés et annotés par Jean-Paul Bouillon. Hermann, Paris, 1993, p.83.
23. “Je suis de tempérament rustique, mélancolique, d'aspect grossier et sauvage, et ce n'est qu'à la longue que je puis plaire”, Letter of 20 November 1883, *Correspondance de Camille Pissarro*. Janine Bailly-Herberg ed., vol. I: Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1980, p. 190.

24. “Regarde les Persans, les Chinois, les Japonais, forme-toi le goût aux hommes vraiment forts, c'est toujours à la source qu'il faut aller: en peinture les Primitifs, en sculpture les Égyptiens, en miniature les Persans.” Letter from Pissarro to Lucien, 25 June 1883, *Correspondance de Camille Pissarro*, vol. I, p. 164.
25. Letter to Pissarro, in Rouen, around mid-May 1884, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 63.
26. Daniel Wildenstein: *Gauguin. Premier itinéraire d'un sauvage. Catalogue de l'oeuvre peint (1873-1888)*, p.xx
27. “Mr Césanne a-t-il trouvé la formule exacte d'une oeuvre admise par tout le monde? S'il trouvait la recette pour comprimer l'expression outrée de toutes ses sensations dans un seul et unique procédé je vous en prie tâchez de le faire causer pendant son sommeil en lui administrant une de ces drogue mystérieuses et homéopathique et venez au plus tôt à Paris nous en faire part.” Letter to Pissarro, June 1881, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 21.
28. “Allons faire un Cézanne”; declaration by Paul Sérusier quoted in Charles Chassé: *Gauguin et son temps*, Paris, 1955, p. 50.
29. “Je n'avais qu'une petite sensation, Monsieur Gauguin me l'a volée!” in Gustave Geffroy: *Claude Monet. Sa vie, son oeuvre* [1924]. Macula, Paris, 1980, p. 328. Maurice Denis recoge otra versión más elaborada que le contó Octave Mirbeau: “Ah! ce Gauguin! J'avais une petite sensation et il me l'a prise. Il l'a menée en Bretagne, à la Martinique, à Tahiti, oui, dans tous les paquebots!” Denis: *Journal, La Colombe*, ed. du Vieux Colombier, Paris, 1957-59; vol. II, p. 46.
30. “Voilà des merveilles d'un art essentiellement pur et qu'on ne se lasse pas de regarder.” Letter to Pissarro,

around 10 July 1884, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 65.

31. Daniel Wildenstein: *Gauguin. Premier itinéraire d'un sauvage. Catalogue de l'oeuvre peint (1873-1888)*.
32. “Au centre de l'Eden, Ygdrasil, l'arbre logarithmique, plongeait dans le sol ses racines de vie, et promenait sur la pelouse autour, l'ombre épaisse de son feuillage où s'éployait la seule Nuit. Dans l'ombre, contre son tronc, s'appuyait le livre du Mystère -- où se lisait la vérité qu'il faut connaître. Et le vent, soufflant dans les feuilles de l'arbre, en épelait, le long du jour, les hiéroglyphes nécessaires.”
33. Merette Bodelsen: “Gauguin collector”, *The Burlington Magazine*, September 1970, pp. 590-616.
34. “Les lignes monotonement courbes du buisson des saules, du rideau des peupliers, concourent à une impression de paix rural, attendrissante.” “Camille Pissarro”, in Albert Aurier: *Textes critiques 1889-1892. De l'impressionnisme au symbolisme*. École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, 1995, p. 56.
35. “Les arbres rangés comme des soldats et les ombres portées en gradin comme un escalier.” Letter to Pissarro, between 25 and 29 July 1883, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 51.
36. “Vous voyez que la pensée influe directement sur l'écriture. Avez-vous une lettre de Césanne.” Letter to Pissarro, end of November-beginning of December 1884, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 77.
37. “Voyez Césanne [sic] l'incompris; la nature essentiellement mystique de l'Orient, [...] il affectionne sous la forme le mystère et la tranquillité lourde de l'homme couché pour rêver.” Letter to Schuffenecker, 14 January 1885, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 88.

38. “Il a fallu un immense génie pour imaginer des fleurs qui soient des muscles d'animaux ou des muscles qui soient des fleurs. Tout l'Orient mystique rêveur se retrouve là-dedans.” Gauguin: “Notes sur l'art à l'Exposition universelle”, *Le Moderniste illustré*, 4 Juoly 1889, p. 86.
39. “Le chant de l'arabesque” is a phrase quoted in Gaston Diehl: *Henri Matisse*. Pierre Tisné, Paris, 1954, quoted in Matisse: *Écrits et propos sur l'art. Textes, notes et index établis par Dominique Fourcade*. Hermann, Paris, 1992, p. 134.
40. “Il y a dans ces sous-bois aux végétations, aux flores monstrueuses, aux formidables coulées de soleil, un mystère presque religieux, une abondance sacrée d'Éden.” “Paul Gauguin” [1891], in Octave Mirbeau: *Des artistes*. Préface d'Hubert Juin. Union Générale d'Éditions, Paris, 1986, p. 126.
41. “Je suis tout confus et rouge en lisant vos compliments à propos du bois que je vous ai envoyé; je suis heureux qu'il vous plaise” Letter to Pissarro, 9 November 1882, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 35.
42. “L'Exposition des Indépendants en 1881”, in Joris-Karl Huysmans: *L'art moderne. Certains*. Préface d'Hubert Juin. Union Générale d'Éditions, Paris, 1975, pp. 239-243.
43. See for example the letter to Pissarro of late May 1885, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 107.
44. “Gauguin est redevenu très intime de Degas et va le voir souvent, curieux, n'est-ce pas, cette bascule des intérêts!” Letter from Pissarro to his son Lucien, 23 November 1886, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 141.
45. “Manet avait endossé l'uniforme de chef maintenant qu'il est mort Degas va lui succéder et c'est un

- impressioniste qui *dessine!*” Letter to Pissarro, around 7 May 1883, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 43.
46. “Il [Degas] ne trouve pas en effet dans mes toiles ce qu'il voit lui (la mauvaise odeur du modèle).” Letter to Emile Bernard, November 1889, in *Lettres de Gauguin à sa femme et à ses amis*, p. 174.
47. E. Bernard, “Concernant Paul Gauguin”, *Nouvelle revue d'Égypte*, January 1904, p. 8. Cited in Wildenstein: *Gauguin. Premier itinéraire d'un sauvage. Catalogue de l'oeuvre peint (1873-1888)*, vol. II, p. 303.
48. “L'une, que sectionne à la ceinture l'eau, développe un large dessin d'épaules, une architecture d'opulente bourgeoisie; sur le pré, une pantoise petite servante, aux courts cheveux raides, à l'ahuri museau, la regarde grelotter, et, hésitante à faire le dernier pas, la main gauche au genou, -- hanche. Un grêle, rectiligne et lisse fût, déjà vu dans Cézanne, les sépare et divise la toile en deux caissons.” “Aux magasins des marchands de tableaux” [1888], en Fénéon: *Oeuvres plus que complètes. Textes réunis et présentés par Joan U. Halperin. Tome I Chroniques d'art. Librairie Droz, Geneva-Paris, 1970*, p. 95.
49. “Je suis en train de faire une gavotte bretonne dansée par 3 petites filles au milieu des foins [...]. Ce tableau me paraît original et j'en suis assez content au point de vue du dessin.” Letter to Théo van Gogh, around 15-18 June 1888, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 151.
50. Wildenstein: *Gauguin. Premier itinéraire d'un sauvage. Catalogue de l'oeuvre peint (1873-1888)*, p.
51. “Je vais m'occuper du tableau à retoucher; évidemment la main qui arrive dans le cadre prend beaucoup d'importance et je la croyais nécessaire ainsi pour équilibrer la danse qui a la forme d'un S. Mais comme ce sont des toquades de peintre et non d'amateur je tâcherai d'y remédier ou plutôt atténuer.” Letter to Théo van

Gogh, 14 November 1888, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 282.

52. “Aussi je viens de faire quelques nus dont vous seres content. Et ce n'est pas du tout du Degas _ Le dernier est une lutte de 2 gamins près de la rivière -- tout à fait japonais par un Français sauvage du Perou”. Letter to Schuffenecker, 8 July 1888, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, pp. 197-198.
53. Denise Delouche: “Gauguin au regard des autres peintres, ses prédecesseurs en Bretagne”, in Delouche (ed.): *Pont-Aven et ses peintres*, Presses Universitaires de Rennes 2, l'Institut Culturel de Bretagne, Rennes, 1986, p. 62.
- ~~54. Walter Pater, “Winckelmann”, *The Renaissance*, xxxx, xxxxx~~
55. “Une note de plein air peut être une jolie chose par-ci par-là mais celà ne constitue complètement un *tableau* et la preuve c'est que vous vous donnez la peine d'en faire.” Letter to Pissarro, August or September 1881, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 22.
56. “Quant à ce qui est de vous, je crois qu'il est temps (si toutefois c'est votre tempérament) de faire *plus à l'atelier* mais alors des choses mûries à l'avance au point de vue de l'arrangement et de la *scène*.” Letter to Pissarro, May-June 1882, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 29.
57. “Tâchez de venir dimanche prochain j'ai bien des choses *commencées* à vous faire voir j'espère que celà vous intéressera ce ne sont pas des résultats que je cherche ce sont des documents que je range pour plus tard.” Letter to Pissarro, May-June 1882, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 29.
58. “Le petit Bernard est ici et a rapporté [...] des choses intéressantes. En voilà un qui ne redoute rien.” Letter to

- Schuffenecker, 14 August 1888, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 210.
59. Dujardin: "Aux XX et aux Indépendants. Le Cloisonnisme", *La Revue Indépendante*, March 1888, p. 489.
60. "Le Pardon de Pont-Aven venait d'avoir lieu, et j'avais peint, me servant comme thème du costume local, une prairie ensoleillé de parti pris jaune historiée de coiffes bretonnes et de groupes noir-bleu. De ce tableau Gauguin partit et fit la Vision du sermon tableau dans lequel les coiffes formaient également le motif principal. [...] Ce tableau à teintes plates tranchait comme une négation sur les oeuvres précédentes de Paul Gauguin, il se rapprochait jusqu'à la ressemblance de mes 'Bretonnes dans la Prairie'." É. Bernard "Note sur l'école dite de Pont-Aven", *Mercure de France*, December 1903, pp. 679-680.
61. "J'ai fait pour une église un tableau naturellement il a été refusé aussi je le renvoie à Van Gogh. Inutile de vous le décrire vous le verrez. J'ai cette année tout sacrifié l'exécution la couleur pour le style voulant m'imposer autre chose que ce que je sais faire." Letter to Schuffenecker, 8 October 1888, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 248-49.
62. Merete Bodelsen: "The Missing Link in Gauguin's Cloisonism", *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, 53, May-June 1959, pp. 329-344.
63. Mark Roskill: *Van Gogh, Gauguin and the Impressionist Circle*. New York Graphic Society, Greenwich (Conn.), 1970, p. 170.
64. Ziva Amishai-Maisels: *Gauguin's Religious Themes*. Garland Publishing Inc., New York & London, 1985, pp. 28-30.
65. Michel Hoog: *Gauguin: vie et œuvre*. Office du Livre, Fribourg, 1987, p. 77.

66. “Je viens de faire un tableau religieux très mal fait mais qui m'a intéressé à faire et qui me plaît. Je voulais le donner à l'église de Pont-Aven. Naturellement on n'en veut pas. [...] Je crois avoir atteint dans les figures una grande simplicité rustique et superstitieuse. [...] Pour moi dans ce tableau le paysage et la lutte n'existent que dans l'imagination des gens en prière par suite du sermon c'est pourquoi il y a contraste entre les gens nature et la lutte dans son paysage non nature et disproportionnée.” Letter to Vincent, around 25-27 September 1888, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, pp. 230-232.
67. “Gauguin n'est pas un voyant, c'est un malin qui a senti un retour rétrograde de la bourgeoisie en arrière par suite des grandes idées de solidarité qui germent dans le peuple, idée inconsciente mais féconde et la seule légitime! Les symbolistes sont dans le même cas! Qu'en penses-tu?... Aussi il faut les combattre comme le peste!” Letter to Lucien, 20 April 1891, *Correspondance de Camille Pissarro*. Édition de Janine Bailly-Herberg. Vol. III: Éditions du Valhermeil, Paris, 1988, p. 66. A week later he would repeat the same arguments: Letter to Lucien, 13 May 1891, *Correspondance de Camille Pissarro*, vol. III, p. 82.
68. “Le tableau d'église vous sera remis et vous pourrez le montrer. Malheureusement il est fait pour une église et ce qui va là n'a pas le même effet dans cet entourage de vitraux pierres etc.. que dans celui d'un salon.” Letter to Théo van Gogh, 7/8 October 1888, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, pp. 247-248.
69. Vojtech Jirat-Watsiutynski y Travers Newton: “Tradition et innovation dans la technique picturale de Paul Gauguin”, in *Gauguin. Actes du colloque Gauguin*, pp. 71-72.
70. “Je crois avoir atteint dans les figures una grande simplicité rustique et superstitieuse.” Letter to Vincent,

around 25-27 September 1888, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, pp. 230-232.

71. In an exhaustive study on Brittany published in 1885, Henri Baudrillart referred to the “goût porté jusqu'à la passion pour le surnaturel qu'on a toujours remarqué dans la Bretagne rural” (Baudrillart: *Les populations agricoles de la France. Tome 1, Normandie et Bretagne, passé et présent*. Librairie Guillaumin, Paris, 1885, p. 377) while elsewhere he explained that “l'imagination porté au merveilleux, au surnaturel, par suite aux légendes, en est un des caractères les plus prononcés [of the Breton spirit].” (p. 417)
72. Victor Segalen: *Gauguin dans son dernier décor et autres textes de Tahiti*. Bibliothèque artistique et littéraire, Fontfroide, 1986, pp. 53-54.
73. “Un conseil, ne copiez pas trop d'après nature. L'art est une abstraction; tirez-la de la nature en rêvant devant et pensez plus à la création qu'au résultat c'est le seul moyen de monter vers Dieu en faisant comme notre divin maître créer.” Letter to Schuffenecker, 14 August 1888, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I , p. 210.
74. Baudelaire: *Critique d'art suivi de Critique musicale*. Édition établie par Claude Pichois. Gallimard, Paris, 1992, pp. 288-289.
75. The image appears in the fifth section of the book, Book VI, Chap iv.
76. Hugo: *Les contemplations*. Préface de Léon-Paul Fargue. Édition établie par Pierre Albouy. Gallimard, Paris, 2002, pp. 162ff.
77. *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 501 note 277.
78. “Aux yeux de l'artiste, en effet [...] les objets ne peuvent avoir de valeur en tant qu'objets. Ils ne peuvent lui apparaître que comme des *signes*. Ce sont les lettres d'un immense alphabet que l'homme de génie seul sait épeler. Écrire sa pensée, son poème, avec ces signes, en se

rappelant que le signe, pour indispensable qu'il soit, n'est rien en lui-même et que l'idée seule est tout, telle apparaît donc la tâche de l'artiste". "Le symbolisme en peinture, Paul Gauguin" [1891], in Albert Aurier: *Textes critiques 1889-1892. De l'impressionnisme au symbolisme.* École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts, Paris, 1995, p. 33.

79. "La proie des littérateurs". "M. Gauguin" [1891], in Fénéon: *Oeuvres plus que complètes*, vol. I, p. 192.
80. "Si tu savais avec quelle platitude Gauguin a agi pour arriver à se faire élire (c'est le mot) homme de génie, et cela fort adroitemment." *Correspondance de Camille Pissarro*, vol. III, p. 81.
81. Ziva Amishai-Maisels: *Gauguin's Religious Themes*, p. 31.
82. "Naturellement, Gauguin, consolé par ma soeur, qui avait un vrai caractère de sainte et d'artiste, tomba amoureux d'elle et songea à l'enlever; mais mon père s'interposa à temps." E. Bernard, 1939, p. 11.
83. Van Gogh, letter to Bernard B 19a.
84. Douglas W. Druick and Peter Kort Zegers: *Van Gogh and Gauguin. The Studio of the South*, p. 224.
85. "Il n'y a pas de sujet dans cette toile, mais les couleurs sonnent une fanfare puissante, et les figures, dans leur dessin simplifié, restent si peu humaines qu'elles semblent venues d'un autre monde mystérieux et terrible." G.-Daniel de Monfreid: "Paul Gauguin", *La Revue provinciale*, November 1903, p. 386.
86. Letter to Théo 534, *Correspondance complète de Vincent van Gogh*,
87. C. Boyle-Turner. *Gauguin and the School of Pont-Aven. Prints and Paintings*. Foreword by Douglas Druick. Royal Academy of Arts – Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1986, p. 38.
88. "He was intrigued by the idea of people as a reflection of their environment. This formed a theme in many of his

- paintings, and is the thread that unifies his Volpini album.” C. Boyle-Turner: *Gauguin and the School of Pont-Aven*, p. 42.
89. Richard Brettel, Françoise Cachin, Charles F. Stuckey, Claire Frèches-Thory: *The Art of Paul Gauguin*. National Gallery of Art, Washington –The Art Institute of Chicago, p. 132.
 90. Douglas W. Druick & Peter Kort Zegers: *Van Gogh and Gauguin. The Studio of the South*, p. 277.
 91. “Ce n'est pas une nature privée d'intelligence, de grâce et de tous les dons de la nature. C'est une femme.” Letter to Schuffenecker, 20 December 1888, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 306.
 92. “Dans le village de Java il y a des danses Hindous. Tout l'art de l'Inde se trouve là et les photographies que j'ai du Cambodge se retrouvent là textuellement.” Letter to Émile Bernard, March 1889, in *Lettres de Gauguin à sa femme et à ses amis*, p. 157.
 93. Carta from Vincent to Gauguin, 23 or 24 January 1889, in *Paul Gauguin: 45 Lettres à Vincent, Théo et Jo van Gogh*. Introducion and annotations by Douglas Cooper. Collection Rijksmuseum Vincent van Gogh, Amsterdam. 's-Gravenhage, Staatsuitgeverij, 1983, pp. 270-271.
 94. In *Antes y después* insistirá in the coincidences between the Vedas, Buddah and the Bible: *Avant et après*, pp. 171-175.
 95. On Aurier's poem, see Loevgren, *Genesis of modernism*, p. 138.
 96. “Quel artiste, ce Jésus qui a taillé en pleine humanité.” Letter to Schuffenecker, end of August 1888, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 216.
 97. “C'est un long calvaire à parcourir que la vie d'artiste!” Letter to Vincent van Gogh, around 7-9 September 1888, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, p. 220.

98. During their period together in Arles, Gauguin and Van Gogh visited together the Montpellier Museum, where they looked at a painting by Antoine Verdier which represented the red-headed Bruyas as Christ with a crown of thorns. Douglas W. Druick and Peter Kort Zegers: *Van Gogh and Gauguin. The Studio of the South*, p. 255.
99. See the letters to Théo nos. 505 and 540. *Correspondance complète de Vincent van Gogh, enrichie de tous les dessins originaux*. Traduction de M. Beerblock et L. Roelandt. Introduction et notes de Georges Charensol, Gallimard-Grasset, 1960.
100. “Pour donner une impression d'angoisse, on peut chercher à le faire sans viser droit au jardin de Gethsemani historique.” Letter to Émile Bernard B 21, early December 1889, *Correspondance complète de Vincent van Gogh*, vol. III, p. 414.
101. “C'est que j'ai travaillé ce mois-ci dans les vergers d'oliviers, car ils m'avaient fait enrager avec leurs Christs au jardin, où rien n'est observé. Bien entendu chez moi il n'est pas question de faire quelque chose de la Bible --et j'ai écrit à Bernard et aussi à Gauguin, que je croyais que la pensée et non le rêve étaient notre devoir, que donc j'étais étonné devant leur travail de ce qu'ils se laissent aller à cela.” Letter to Théo no. 615, 21 November 1889. *Correspondance complète de Vincent van Gogh*, vol. III, p. 407.
102. “Vous devez vous rappeler ce que raconte Jacques de Voragine, que la nuit de la naissance du Sauveur les vignes fleurirent dans toute la Palestine. [...] Nous peintres, nous devons plutôt peindre la floraison de ces vignes que les tourbillons d'anges qui trompettent le Messie.” Joachim Gasquet: *Cézanne* [1921]. Encre marine, Paris, 2002, p. 310.
103. “Depuis Manet, il [Gauguin] est le peintre français qui eut la plus grande influence. Ce que fut Manet, pour la

- génération de 1870, Gauguin le fut pour celle de 1890.” “La peinture” [1905], in Denis: *Le Ciel et l’Arcadie*, p. 85.
104. See the letters to Mette of end of July 1886, *Correspondance de Paul Gauguin*, vol. I, pp. 133, 137.
105. Letter to Lucien, 22 January 1887, *Correspondance de Camille Pissarro*, vol. II, p. 119.
106. “La influence de Paul Gauguin” [1903], in Denis: *Le Ciel et l’Arcadie*, p. 8.
107. “Se rappeler qu'un tableau --avant d'être un cheval de bataille, une femme nue, ou une quelconque anecdote-- est essentiellement une surface plane recouverte de couleurs en un certain ordre assemblées”. “Définition du néo-traditionnisme” [1890], in Denis: *Le Ciel et l’Arcadie*, p. 5.
108. “Les émotions ou états d'âme provoqués par un spectacle quelconque, comportaient dans l'imagination de l'artiste des signes ou équivalents plastiques capables de reproduire ces émotions ou états d'âme sans qu'ils soit besoin de fournir la copie du spectacle initial; qu'à chaque état de notre sensibilité devait correspondre une harmonie objective capable de le traduire.” “De Gauguin et de Van Gogh au classicisme” [1909], in Denis: *Le Ciel et l’Arcadie*, p. 162.
109. “La *déformation objective* obligeait à son tour l'artiste à tout transposer en Beauté.” “De Gauguin et de Van Gogh au classicisme” [1909], in Denis: *Le Ciel et l’Arcadie*, p. 163.
110. Denis: *Journal*, vol. I, p. 150.
111. “Certes non, ce n'était pas une théorie idéaliste. Résultat immédiat des philosophies positives, alors en vogue, et des méthodes d'induction que nous eûmes en si grand respect, ce fut bien la tentative d'art la plus strictement scientifique. Ceux qui l'ont inauguré étaient des paysagistes, des nature-mortistes, pas du tout des

- “peintres de l’âme.” “Notes sur la peinture religieuse” (1896), in Denis: *Le Ciel et l’Arcadie*, p. 36.
112. “Un tableau est une surface colorée, dans laquelle les divers tons et les divers degrés de lumière sont répartis avec un certain choix; voilà son être intime”, quoted in Denis: *Le Ciel et l’Arcadie*, p. 5, n. 3.
113. xxxxxx
114. “J’avais le sentiment de ne voir qu’une moitié des choses. Je croyais les autres initiés à des rites qu’on me cachait parce que j’étais trop jeune. Quand j’entrais, les conversations se taisaient devant moi, parfois je surprénais des signes que j’étais seul à ne pas comprendre, et, le soir surtout, quand je m’en allais dormir, je soupçonnais que des choses très mystérieuses se passaient pendant mon sommeil.” Gide: *Les cahiers d’André Walter. Avec des fragments inédits du Journal*. Édition établie et présentée par Claude Martin, Gallimard, Paris, 1986, p. 214.
115. “Nommer un objet, c'est supprimer les trois-quarts de la jouissance du poème qui est fait du bonheur de deviner peu à peu; le *suggérer*, voilà le rêve. C'est le parfait usage de ce mystère qui constitue le symbole: évoquer petit à petit un objet pour montrer un état d’âme, ou, inversement, choisir un objet et en dégager un état d’âme, par une série de déchiffrements.” “Réponse à l’enquête de Jules Huret sur l'évolution littéraire” (1891), Stéphane Mallarmé: *Igitur. Divagations. Un coup de dés*. Préface d'Yves Bonnefoy. Gallimard, Paris, 1976, p. 392.
116. “La poésie commence où naît le mystère”. Draft of a letter of late 1884, sold at Christie’s, Geneva, 14 May 2001; quoted in Wildenstein: *Gauguin. Premier itinéraire d'un sauvage. Catalogue de l'oeuvre peint (1873-1888)*, vol. I, p. XXXIII.
117. “Le Nabi en mission à Tahiti”, letter from Ranson to Verkade, October-November 1892, quoted in Mauner:

- The Nabis: Their History and their Art, 1886-1896.* Garland Publishing, New York and London, 1978, p. 282.
118. "Demain je deviendrai élève de Bernard et de Sérusier." Letter to Monfreid, March 1897, *Lettres de Paul Gauguin à Daniel de Monfreid*, p. 168.
119. Letter to Monfreid, January 1900, *Lettres de Paul Gauguin à Daniel de Monfreid*, pp. 268-269. "Toute la bande Sérusier, Denis et Cie". Letter to Monfreid July 1898, *Lettres de Paul Gauguin à Daniel de Monfreid*, p. 219.
120. "Ne vous y trompez pas, Bonnard, Vuillard, Sérusier, pour citer quelques jeunes, sont des musiciens, et soyez persuadés que la peinture colorée entre dans une phase musicale." Gauguin: *Racontars de rapin* [1902]. Editions Sauret, Monaco, 1993, p. 45.
121. "Vous connaissez depuis longtemps ce que j'ai voulu établir: le *droit* de tout oser: mes capacités [...] n'ont pas donné un grand résultat, mais cependant la machine est lancée. Le public ne me doit rien puisque mon oeuvre picturale n'est que relativement bonne, mais les peintres qui, aujourd'hui, profitent de cette liberté, me doivent quelque chose." Letter to Monfreid, October 1902, *Lettres de Paul Gauguin à Daniel de Monfreid*, p. 348.

